

No 97

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FAME AND FORTUNE

STORIES OF
BOYS

WEEKLY

WHO MAKE
MONEY.

**FIRST IN THE FIELD;
OR, DOING BUSINESS FOR HIMSELF.**

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



Bob suddenly grabbed Max Fowler and exclaimed: "Now, then, twenty-three for you! March—one, two, three!" The third step landed Fowler on the threshold of the shop, and a push completed his ignominious exit.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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FIRST IN THE FIELD

OR,

DOING BUSINESS FOR HIMSELF

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE BOOM AT RIVERDALE.

"Say, Joe," said Bob Channing, looking up from the copy of the Westgate semi-weekly "Times" he was reading, as his chum, Joe Craig, came walking up the gravel path that led from the shady street to the veranda of the Channing cottage, "what do you think? That one-horse little village of Riverdale, ten miles below here, has got a boom on."

"So I heard my father say the other day," replied Joe; "but I didn't take much stock in the report. Has the 'Times' got something to say about it this morning?"

"Yes; a whole lot."

"Let's hear," said Joe, in a tone of some interest. "Why, Riverdale hasn't even got a bank, I understand."

"That's right. The only thing of importance in the whole place is Graham's Mill, employing some sixty people. When the mill was started six months ago my father had an offer to take charge of the engine-room at a slight advance over his present wages, but as he had bought this cottage at a bargain, though he hasn't paid for it yet, he didn't consider he could afford to make any change."

"I'm glad of that, old man," replied Joe, "for I wouldn't like to have you move away. We've been chums ever since you came here to live, and I'd feel lost without you."

"Same here, Joe. Still, now that I'm through school, and have got to get to work, if I had any capital a growing place, such as Riverdale promises to be from this out, is just the spot I'd like to anchor in and start a business of my own."

"Is that so?" asked Joe, in some surprise. "Why?"

"Because the fellow who is first in the field is the one who stands the best chance of getting ahead."

"There's something in that, I'll admit."

"Of course there is. But what's the use of talking? I haven't got any capital, so there's no use of my thinking of going into business for myself."

"What kind of business would you like to go into?"

"I've often thought that I'd like to start a stationery and periodical store, with a soda water attachment, and candy and cigars for a side line."

"That's a good business, if you can get trade enough to keep the ball rolling."

"Sure it is. Charley Brown, on Main Street, has got such a shop, you know, and he tells me that he's doing fine, though he's got several competitors."

"Well, Westgate is a live town, and there are several thousand people here to draw upon. Now, Riverdale is only an obscure village, and it will take some years before it gets within hailing distance of this burg."

"Oh, I don't know. When one of our Western villages takes on a boom, such as Riverdale seems to be started on, it doesn't take long for it to become a place of some importance."

Joe didn't take the same enthusiastic view of the subject that Bob did, for he was built on different lines from his chum.

He had never thought about going into any business for himself, probably because he was somewhat deficient in ambition.

Bob, on the contrary, was a pushing, ambitious boy,

always scheming and planning with an eye to the future.

Some day he meant to be his own boss, and he didn't intend to permit the grass to grow under his feet just because he did not see any immediate prospect of reaching that desirable condition.

While it is true that there is a saying that all things come to him who waits, it does not exactly mean that success comes to him who, Wilkins Micawber-like, waits for something to turn up.

Bob, while obliged by circumstances to wait until things began to come his way, was a boy who was wide awake enough to scent a favorable slant of good luck in the distance and then hustle to meet it half way and grab it before it got by him.

He was determined when Fortune knocked at his door to be right on hand to tell the capricious dame to walk in and make herself at home.

In fact, he would have helped her to take her hat and cape off, and pushed a chair forward for her to sit down, so that she couldn't find any excuse for leaving.

Bob's energy and perseverance made him a general favorite with his comrades, for he took the lead in all sports, and made things hum when he was around.

Whether it was at a game of baseball, or a row on the river that ran by the town, or a spin on the wheel, or a tackle at football, he went at it as though it was the business of his life, and consequently he became a shining mark among his school-fellows, and they were proud to acknowledge him as their leader.

Bob's father and mother were naturally very proud of him, and the former especially said that the boy was a comer, and from all indications he seemed to be right.

"Well," said Joe, in answer to Bob's last remark, "let's hear what the 'Times' has to say about Riverdale."

"It has this to say," replied Bob, picking up the paper and referring to the column in which the news appeared.

Then he read out all the particulars printed about the boom that the village in question was taking on.

Several enterprising business men from Chicago had picked out Riverdale as an ideal spot at which to put up a big bolt and nut works, a carriage manufactory, a furniture factory, and one or two other enterprises that would employ a considerable number of people.

They had laid their plans before the directors of the railroad company whose line traversed the country within eight miles of the village, touching at Westgate ten miles to the west, and Chester twenty miles to the east, and the company found it advantageous to their interests to begin the immediate construction of a branch line from Centerville, the nearest town to Riverdale.

Sidney Graham, proprietor of the Graham Mill, and several of the more important residents of the village, had, in view of the expanding interests of Riverdale, recently applied for a charter to establish a bank, and this would be opened for business as soon as the necessary formalities had been gone through with.

A printer from Chester was putting in a plant to establish a weekly newspaper, and several other businesses were soon to be introduced into the place.

Altogether, Riverdale bade fair to shortly take its place on the map, and in the gazetteers as something better than

a mere collection of houses strung for the most part on one shady street.

The Westgate "Times" did not apprehend that the boom would hurt the growth of that town in the least, and it therefore took the occasion to congratulate the little village on its coming wave of prosperity.

"Well, what do you think of Riverdale now, Joe?"

"It seems to be looking up and taking notice," grinned Joe.

"Take my word for it, that a year from now the oldest inhabitant won't be able to recognize the village. It will be a lively little town that will make even Westgate here get a hustle on to keep in the van."

"Ho! Don't you believe it. Riverdale will never get within hailing distance of this place."

"Is that so? Well, don't you be too sure of it. Remember, it's got one advantage over this town: it's practically at the head of navigation on the river. The shallows, two miles this side of Riverdale, where the river narrows out through the woods, cuts off Westgate from the east by water. No craft of any depth can pass that point. Snake River, so far as this place is concerned, is little better than a long and narrow lake."

"What of it? Westgate hasn't much use for the river, anyway. The railroad is good enough for us. River navigation is out of date."

"No, it isn't out of date, by any means. However, I won't argue the matter, as it would only be a waste of time. All I can say is, that if I had a little capital I'd go right to Riverdale now, rent a shop as close to the new railroad station as I could get, and open up a business on the lines I mentioned."

"And you think you would succeed, do you?"

"It wouldn't be my fault if I didn't. I wouldn't sit behind the counter and let people find out that I was there. Not on your life. I'll bet every person in the village would know inside of twenty-four hours after I had my stock on my shelves that Bob Channing was prepared to sell them anything in the stationery, periodical, cigar and candy line that they could reasonably expect to get within a radius of a hundred miles about. What I didn't carry in stock I'd get for them, so I wouldn't give one of them an excuse for sending either to Chester, or Centerville, or this place for anything in my line. All the new factory hands that are coming to Riverdale will want tobacco, cigars and reading matter, and I'm the boy that would supply them right up to the handle."

"Gee! I believe you'd get along all right," said Joe, impressed by his chum's earnestness and enthusiasm. "I'd like to be your partner."

"I'm afraid the business wouldn't stand a partner for some time, or I'd be glad to have you with me."

"You talk just as if you expected to open up there."

"I talk just as I feel, that's all. I wish I was in the position to take advantage of the situation, but I'm not, unfortunately. Some other fellow will step in and garner the cream, if he's smart enough. One of these days, however, I'll be on hand somewhere with both feet, and then I'll have the chance to carry out my business ideas as I see fit."

"You'll never get left, I'll bet a hat. I wish I had your head."

"Oh, your head is all right, I guess, only we're not alike. We probably wouldn't both succeed at the same thing. Find what you're cut out for and then put your whole soul into making that thing a success, and the chances are you'll come out a winner in the end. Now let's go swimming."

CHAPTER II.

THE STOLEN POCKETBOOK.

"What is the matter, father?" asked Bob Channing, as he walked into the engine-room of the Westgate Woolen Mills next morning about eleven o'clock and saw his father seated on a stool with his head buried in his hands.

Richard Channing, whose overalls and checked jumper, stained with grime and oil spots, plainly showed that he was the engineer of the mills, raised his head and looked at his stalwart, good-looking son.

Bob was alarmed at the expression he saw on his father's features.

His face was ghastly pale, a look of mute despair shone out of his eyes, and he was trembling with excitement.

"Matter!" ejaculated the engineer, in hollow tones. "I've lost my pocketbook."

"Lost your pocketbook?" answered Bob, rather surprised at the intense emotion displayed by his father, for Mr. Channing was not in the habit of carrying much more than a dollar about him for pocket money. "There wasn't much in it, was there?"

"Wasn't much in it!" exclaimed his father, in a hoarse voice. "There was twelve hundred dollars in it."

"Twelve hundred dollars!" gasped Bob, in amazement.

"Yes. Every cent I had in the bank. I drew it an hour ago, intending to pay off the mortgage on our cottage, which is due to-day. Now the money is gone—lost. Oh, Heaven, what shall I do?"

Bob was staggered by this unexpected revelation.

He knew that his father and mother had been practising great economy for the past three years in order to save the money to wipe out the mortgage on their home.

He had heard his father say the night before at supper that on the morrow they would own the cottage free and clear of any incumbrance, and both his parents seemed to be very happy over the bright prospect ahead.

Now, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, came this announcement that his father had, at the eleventh hour, lost the money he had striven so hard to accumulate.

It was simply a terrible and overwhelming misfortune, and the boy no longer wondered at the despairing, haggard look on his father's countenance.

"You say you drew the money from the bank an hour ago, father?" asked Bob.

"Yes."

"Did you lose the money on the street?"

"No. I had it when I came back to the engine-room, for I opened the pocketbook and looked at it just before I took off my coat and hung it up on yonder nail."

"Have you been out of the engine-room since you came back?"

His father shook his head gloomily.

"Then it must be in your pocket still," said Bob, hopefully, starting for the jacket, which now lay upon the tool bench.

"It isn't. I searched every pocket thoroughly, though I knew positively I put it in the inside pocket."

"Has any stranger been in here since you returned?"

"There's been no one here but Steve Fowler."

Bob glanced around the engine-room and observed Fowler, the fireman, watching them in a furtive manner from under his shaggy, beetling eyebrows.

He was not a pleasant-looking nor an agreeable man, this Steve Fowler.

He was a surly fellow, who had a standing grouch against the world because things didn't seem to go as well with him as with other people.

In stature he was short and burly, and from the way he handled the iron coal barrow and shoveled the fuel into the furnace, was evidently very strong.

Among his other failings was a great liking for drink, to gratify which at all times he was accustomed to smuggle a pocket flask of whisky into the engine-room.

This was against the rules of the mill, and also against the express orders of the engineer, but Fowler persisted in fetching the flask and taking surreptitious drinks when his superior's back was turned.

He seemed to work better after each drink, and at no time was he so much under the influence of the stimulant that he couldn't do his duty right up to the handle.

For that reason, and also because Fowler had a large family dependent on him for support, Richard Channing refrained from reporting his conduct to the superintendent, and thus bringing about his discharge.

Bob Channing didn't like Steve Fowler's attitude at that moment, and a grave suspicion entered his head.

If his father hadn't been out of the engine-room since he came back from the bank, and knew that the money was in his jacket when he hung it on its accustomed hook, and nobody had been in the place since except the fireman, it struck the boy that it was quite within the bounds of reason to suppose that Steve Fowler might know something about the missing pocketbook.

Whether it was that there was something in the boy's eye that disquieted the fireman or because he had some other reason for quitting his post, he laid down the oil can he had been using up to that moment and sauntered slowly and doggedly toward the door.

"Look here, Fowler," said Bob, stepping up to the fireman, "have you seen my father's pocketbook anywhere?"

"No, I haven't," replied Steve in a sulky and defiant tone.

"Did you help my father hunt for it?"

"No. He didn't ask me to."

"It was an oblong, black pocketbook, wasn't it, father?"

"Yes."

"What's that sticking out of your shirt now, Fowler?" asked Bob, turning suddenly on the fireman and pointing at his chest.

This was a pure bluff on the boy's part, as he didn't see any sign of the pocketbook in question on Fowler, but his suspicions being aroused, he wanted to see how the fireman would take it.

Steve look startled, grabbed his undershirt, which was half open at the neck, and pulled it over, and edged toward the door.

Bob's words and the man's action had a remarkable effect on Mr. Channing.

It seemed as if he suddenly woke up to the realization that his fireman might have taken advantage of a moment of inattention on his part and have abstracted the wallet from his jacket.

It was quite possible that Fowler had seen him look at the pocketbook when he got back, and had noticed that there was considerable money in it, and then had watched his chance to steal it.

"Steve Fowler," roared Mr. Channing, springing to his feet and clutching the fireman by the wrists as he held his shirt closed, "did you take my pocketbook?"

"No, I didn't," answered the man, doggedly.

"Let me see what you've got inside your shirt," said the engineer, clawing at his assistant's undergarment.

Fowler started back with an imprecation and tried to throw Mr. Channing off.

This action only made the engineer more persistent to get at the truth.

A violent struggle took place between them.

Mr. Channing had worked himself into a condition very unusual for a man of his even temperament.

Bob was astonished at the sudden display of fury he exhibited.

In the mix-up Fowler's shirt was torn and the boy, whose alert eye was watching every move of the struggling men, distinctly saw the end of an oblong, black object thrust down into the fireman's bosom next his skin.

Satisfied that that was the missing wallet, Bob sprang forward to seize and drag it forth into the light.

At that moment Fowler, with a desperate effort, hurled the engineer away from him with great force.

Mr. Channing staggered against the tool bench and then went down on the floor.

Bob, however, reached for the wallet, but as his fingers closed around the end of it, Fowler, with a scream of rage, shoved him away and rushed out of the doorway.

Recovering his balance, the boy darted after him and saw him making for a corner of the yard.

It was close to noon, and the time-keeper was crossing the yard toward his post at the closed gate to take the names of the employees who left the premises during dinner hour.

"Stop him! Stop that man!" yelled Bob.

The clerk heard him, but not seeming to comprehend the situation he permitted Fowler to pass him.

Bob then redoubled his efforts to overtake the fireman.

As he could outstrip Steve on a straight course, he overhauled him rapidly.

Suddenly the rascal made for the door of the office.

Fowler reached it a shade ahead of his pursuer, swung it open, passed through, and then slammed it in Bob's face.

This scarcely delayed the boy more than a moment, but nevertheless it gave the fireman an opportunity to cross the outer end of the office and dart through the main entrance into the street.

Bob was soon at his heels again and caught up with him at the corner of the mill fence.

"Hand over that pocketbook, Steve Fowler, or I'll have

you arrested," cried the boy, reaching out one hand and grabbing the man by the shoulder.

Steve's answer was to turn suddenly and plant a heavy blow on Bob's forehead, which knocked the daylights out of him for several moments, sending him to the ground.

When Bob staggered to his feet and looked around in a dazed way for Fowler, the fireman had disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

FIRE!

Bob figured that Fowler must have passed up or down the next street, a few yards away, so he began to make inquiries of people in the vicinity.

He found a man who had seen the fireman running toward the river which flowed by the town, and the boy resumed his pursuit in that direction.

As Steve's home was in this direction, Bob judged that he was making for it, and with that idea in his mind he made a short cut across lots, hoping to overtake him before he could reach shelter.

When he struck the river road, which was shaded by a great many trees, there was no sign of Fowler in sight.

This was a great disappointment to Bob, for he had counted on cutting the fireman off, and the boy was keyed up for the expected struggle between them.

Looking up and down the road, Bob saw his friend, Joe Craig, seated on a sawed-off tree stump, fishing.

Joe observed the approach of his chum and shouted to him to come over.

Bob dashed across the road.

"Hello! what's the matter!" asked Joe. "You look excited."

"Have you seen Steve Fowler down this way within the last few minutes?" asked Bob, disregarding Craig's question.

"No," replied Joe, in surprise. "Why should he be here at this hour?"

"He stole a pocketbook from my father containing \$1,200, and is trying to get away with it."

"He did!" exclaimed Craig, much astonished. "When?"

"Half an hour ago. I followed him from the engine-room to the corner of the mill fence near Blank Street, where I overtook him, but when I thought I had him cornered he hit me a blow in the face that knocked me silly for a minute or two, and when I got on my feet he was out of sight. Mr. Creswell, who runs a small grocery store near the corner, told me that he had seen Fowler running down toward the river, and thinking he was bound home I chased this way to try and head him off. I'm afraid now that he went in the opposite direction."

"And he has stolen \$1,200 of your father's money?" said Joe. "That's a small fortune."

"It's a fortune to us. It's taken my father over three years to save it."

"That's tough! How did he come to get away with it?"

"My father drew it from the bank this morning, intending to pay off the mortgage on our cottage with it. He hung his coat up in the engine-room, with the wallet in it. In some way Fowler got wind of the fact that the pocketbook contained considerable money, so he watched

his chance when my father wasn't looking and collared it. I never thought much of Steve, but I did not think he was bad enough to rob my father, who, on the whole, has been good to him."

"You'll have to put the police on to him right away. They should be able to catch him before he can get very far."

"I dare say father has done that by this time," replied Bob; "but I'd give a good deal to catch the rascal myself. The worst of it is, he's so strong that I can't handle him myself."

"You can count on me to help you if you only knew where we might be able to find him," said Joe, winding in his line and stowing it away in his pocket.

"We could follow the road down the river on the chance of getting on his trail," said Bob, in a tone that was not over-confident of results.

"Let's do it," replied Joe, jumping to his feet. "Hello! Isn't that him now, coming down the river in a rowboat?"

Bob looked in the direction pointed out by Joe, and sure enough he recognized Steve Fowler, in a boat, pulling lustily at a pair of oars.

"I'll bet he's making for his house to get some clothes before skipping out," he said. "We'll get behind the hedge and follow him in that direction. When he lands, and is about to enter his cottage, we'll take him by surprise, and get the wallet away from him."

"All right," agreed his companion, and they started off.

Occasionally they glanced through the hedge at the river as they went along, and thus kept their quarry in sight.

At length they came in sight of the Fowler cottage, which was hardly a presentable kind of habitation after having been in Steve's possession half a dozen years.

It was a one-story-and-a-half affair, sadly in need of a coat of paint, and much out of repair.

The Fowler family consisted of Steve himself, his wife, who found it necessary to go out washing for the neighbors about twice a week to make both ends meet, Max Fowler, a disagreeable young bully of seventeen years, and three younger children, all girls.

Max was a good-for-nothing boy, who might have helped the family finances if he had been disposed to work regularly.

Why his father didn't compel him to be industrious was a mystery.

Certain it is he was idle about three-quarters of his time, and what he made when he worked he spent on himself in one way or another.

He wouldn't even stay around the cottage when his mother was away to look after his sisters, and to prevent the children from wandering down to the river at the risk of falling in and being drowned Mrs. Fowler was accustomed to lock them in the house when she was absent.

"We'd better get a stick apiece to use as a club, hadn't we?" suggested Joe, as they drew near their destination. "Steve Fowler is not an easy proposition to handle."

Bob agreed that it would be a good idea to provide themselves with a weapon of some kind before tackling the burly fireman, and the boys looked around for something that would answer for cudgels.

While they were thus employed they heard a succession

of shrill screams coming from the direction of the cottage.

"What's up now?" asked Joe, looking ahead.

The screams were childish ones, and seemed to be inspired by terror.

Evidently something unusual was going on at the Fowler home.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Bob, observing smoke coming out of the front windows. "I do believe the house is on fire."

"I guess you're right," replied Joe. "The kids are yelling to beat the band. It's a wonder they don't run out into the road."

Neither of the boys was aware of Mrs. Fowler's practice of locking the little ones in when she went off to her day's work.

"Steve has heard the racket, and I guess he sees the smoke, too, for he's working hard at his oars," said Joe. "It will take him some little time to reach the nearest point of the shore. It looks as if we'll have to lend a hand to save his home and then settle with him afterward. If he's got any gratitude he'll be willing to give up that money in return for our services. If he hasn't we'll make him, if we have to knock the daylights out of him."

Even as he spoke the cries of the children grew more shrill and agonizing, while the smoke increased in density.

Satisfied that the little ones were in peril of their lives, Bob momentarily dismissed his concern about the pocket-book from his mind and, followed by Joe, started at full speed for the burning cottage.

Bob dashed up to the front door and tried the handle. It was locked.

"Come around to the back," he said, making a break for the rear of the building.

On trying the kitchen door he found that locked, too.

"No wonder the young ones can't get out," he said, excitedly. "We've got to break in, Joe."

"That's what we have to do," replied his companion.

Fortunately, there was an axe standing against a small woodpile, and Joe got it.

With one blow he smashed in the lock and the door swung open inward.

Bob rushed inside and made his way to the front room, where he had seen the smoke issuing from the window.

A girl of seven lay shrieking on the rag carpet, her dress on fire, while two younger children stood near by crying and terribly frightened at their sister's peril.

Bob rushed into an adjoining bedroom, tore the comforter from the bed and, returning to the blazing room, wrapped the little girl in it, smothering out the flames that had already destroyed the greater part of her lower garments.

Joe in the meantime had found a bucket in the kitchen, and had fetched it full of water from the well in the yard.

Bob removed the comforter so his companion could pour the water over the smoldering clothes of the little girl, who continued to scream with fright and the pain of her burns, from which she doubtless suffered considerably.

Bob tried his best to calm her, but with little success.

The whole side of the room, however, was on fire by this time, and the smoke was beginning to stifle them.

Bob saw the necessity of removing the children from the danger that threatened.

"Run the kids outside, Joe. I'll follow with this girl."

Craig seized the little ones each by a hand and hurried them out into the yard, while Bob followed with the sufferer in his arms.

"We've got to try and save the house, if we can, Joe," said Bob, laying the girl down near the well. "Stay with your sister, little ones, and don't dare move away," he added to the children.

They regarded him with a look of awe and huddled around the other girl, whose shrieks were now reduced to pitiful moans.

The boys looked around the kitchen for more pails, but none were to be seen.

"Get hold of that pan; it will have to answer. I'll go into the front room for the bucket you had," ordered Bob, assuming command of the situation.

"All right," replied Joe, seizing the pan and making for the well.

Bob entered the burning room, which was now filled with smoke that was pouring out of the two front windows, and grabbed the pail.

He could see the lurid flames creeping up the window frames, and all about the wall.

The boy was afraid that the fire had got too great a headway for them to cope successfully with it.

"I'm afraid it's a hopeless job," he muttered, his eyes beginning to smart from the smoke, as he retreated to the doorway. "However, we'll do the best we can, and that's all we can do."

As he left the room the flames seemed to take a fresh hold on the inflammable material at their mercy.

Apparently the cottage was doomed.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAPPED.

The boys carried two or three pails and pans of water into the front room and threw their contents on the flames without materially diminishing the conflagration.

A half-consumed toy stove lying against the blazing base-board, and a box of matches beside it, suggested the origin of the fire.

Bob soon saw that it was useless to continue to pour water on the flames in the room when he saw that the fire had penetrated the attic.

Unless the blaze could be arrested above, the roof was bound to catch in a few minutes.

So, when they filled their pail and pan again, Bob led the way upstairs, and found the fire just coming through the floor.

Turning the contents of the pan carefully into the blazing hole, he sent Joe back for another supply of water and then continued the good work with the pailful he had carried up himself.

The boys had forgotten all about Steve Fowler in the excitement of the moment, and now that rascal came rushing on the scene in a badly demoralized state.

Joe met him as he issued from the kitchen.

"Get hold of something to carry water and help save your house," said Joe as he hurried past.

Steve caught sight of his three little ones and rushed over to them.

At that moment his wife, who was working not far away and had at length caught sight of the smoke, came running frantically on the scene, followed by two men.

She grabbed the burned girl in her arms and began to cry out for a doctor.

Steve, forgetting about the money he had on his person, hurried away to the house of a physician about half a mile away.

The two men started in to assist the boys put out the fire.

By the time Steve returned with the doctor the exertions of the four had subdued the flames, although they had a strenuous job for a while on their hands.

The front room was badly wrecked, but the house was saved, and that was everything.

Bob had suffered the most from the smoke on account of the position he had maintained in the attic so long as there was any danger.

When he rejoined Joe below his eyes were red and swollen, and smarted a good bit.

As soon as he got the chance, he drew a bucket of water and began bathing them.

The little girl in the meantime had told her mother how Bob had saved her from being burned up, and how Joe had carried her sisters outside the house, and thus saved their lives, too.

The poor woman was deeply grateful to the boys, and expressed her gratitude as best she could under the circumstances.

As soon as his cottage was out of danger, Steve suddenly recollected what had brought him home, and he hastened to get a coat and hat and try to steal away.

Joe saw him when he started for the river.

"Fowler is trying to skip, Bob," he said to his chum. "We'd better get after him at once and prevent him from getting afloat in the boat."

Bob hurriedly dried his smarting eyes, and with Joe started for the road.

Steve was making tracks for his boat.

"Hold on there, Steve Fowler," cried Bob. "Come back and hand over my father's money."

Steve cast a rapid glance over his shoulder and, seeing the two boys in pursuit, broke into a run.

Evidently it was his purpose to hold on to the money.

"Well, he's an ungrateful beast," growled Joe. "He knows you saved the life of his oldest girl, and this is the way he is repaying you. Dern him, I could kick him!"

Joe stopped, picked up a stone and flung it at the rascal.

It missed him by a foot and fell with a splash into the river.

Before Steve could step aboard his boat, which he had moored to an old flat-boat that had stranded at that point, Bob was upon him.

The rascal turned upon the boy with a snarl of rage.

Seizing him by the shoulders and exerting all of his great strength, he fairly flung the lad down the opening of the little cuddy at the after end of the boat.

Bob landed with a jolt that deprived him of consciousness.

Joe was furious at the attack made upon his companion and flew to his aid.

He was equally helpless in the grip of the fireman, who swung him aboard the flatboat as though he were a child, and tumbled him on top of his chum.

Steve then noticing the sliding door to the cuddy, pulled it over and secured it in place by thrusting the stout pin through the hasp.

The boys were thus made prisoners in the little 4 x 6 space below deck, and Steve Fowler was master of the situation.

With an evil laugh he unloosed the painter of his own boat, and as he stepped into her the small flatboat rocked under his weight.

This seemed to suggest a new idea to him.

He worked the rowboat around to the beach, stepped ashore, and while he held the line in his hand he gave the other craft a heavy push, which partially set her afloat.

A second push completed his object, and the current catching the flatboat began to carry her off into midstream.

Presently she was floating down with the tide, and Steve, with a grim chuckle, got into his own boat and, shipping the oars, followed her with leisurely strokes.

In the meantime Joe had crawled off of Bob and was trying to bring his companion to his senses, which was not a difficult matter, as Bob was already coming to himself.

With the door of the cuddy shut, the place would have been wrapped in Cimmerian darkness but for two small openings about six inches square on either side of the boat that answered for windows.

They admitted light and air, and through one shone the rays of the early afternoon sun.

"Well, how are you feeling, Bob?" asked Joe, when his companion sat up and looked around in a bewildered way.

"Kind of rocky," replied Channing. "Where are we? I thought that rascal fired me down into a hole."

"That's what he did. He threw you down into the after hold of a small flatboat that was stranded on the river bank, and when I went for him he treated me to a dose of the same medicine. He's as strong as a horse."

"We've got to get out of here as quick as we can. I suppose he's off in his boat by this time, and we'll lose him."

"He pulled the slide over after he bundled me on top of you," said Joe. "I hope he didn't find a way to secure it, for if he did we're in a pretty fix."

"Say, this craft seems to be afloat. I thought you said it was stranded on the shore."

"So it was. It must have worked off, or Fowler pushed it off. I remember now that the old thing rocked two or three times while I was floundering about."

Joe reached for the slide and tried to open it, but found that it resisted his best efforts.

"Gee! It is secured on the other side, Bob. We're prisoners for fair. What are we going to do now?"

"Try and kick the old thing open, if you can," returned Bob. "I'll help you."

They made an united assault on the door, but found it too stout for the heels of their shoes.

"No go, old man," said Joe, at length. "We're like a pair of rats caught in a trap. Here we are likely to remain until we can attract assistance."

Bob went to one of the small openings in the side of the cuddy and Joe to the other, and looked out on the surface of the river.

The stream was about two hundred yards wide at this point, and though the sense of motion was imperceptible to the boys, a glance at the river banks showed them that they were slowly moving down the stream.

They found that they were about midway in the river.

"Hello!" cried Bob. "Here's Steve now, rowing past us."

Joe turned around and looked over his companion's shoulder.

Fowler was abreast of their observation hole, a few yards away.

He saw the faces of the two boys framed in the little window and he gave them the sardonic laugh.

To better enjoy his triumph he pulled close alongside of the flatboat.

"Well, my chickabiddies, how do you like it in there?" he asked, with a grin.

"You're a nice man, you are," returned Bob, in a tone of disgust. "A fine way to treat us after we saved your cottage from being destroyed and your children from being burned to death. I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself."

"I had to look out for myself. You chaps had no business to follow me," replied Steve.

"No business to follow you?" cried Bob. "After you had stolen every cent of my father's savings!"

"I couldn't resist the temptation of takin' the money when it was so easy to get at. And now I've got it I'm goin' to keep it. I never could earn so much money if I lived to be a hundred. The world hasn't treated me right. I've as much right to have money as your father, for I worked harder than he did. But luck was ag'in me and in his favor. Now I've evened things up. He's got a good job and can make the money over ag'in; I never could make it workin', so I've took it and mean to make the most I can out of it. If you'd left me alone you wouldn't have got into your hole. Now you've got to stay where you are till somebody comes along and lets you out."

With these parting words he resumed rowing once more, and soon shot out of range of the boys' vision.

CHAPTER V.

DOWN THE RIVER.

"It looks as if our names are Mud at present," said Joe, gloomily, as the sound of Steve's oars died away in the distance ahead.

"It's too bad. He'll escape with that money now, and my father never will recover it," replied Bob, dejectedly.

"If your father has notified the police, as I should think it likely he has done long before this, they will probably telephone to Riverdale, Chester and other places to be on the lookout for Fowler, and in that way he might get caught."

"It is more than likely that he won't land anywhere until after dark, if he does then. It's my opinion he'll remain on the river till he gets down to Chester. That's thirty miles from here. Then he'll land somewhere above

the town, sneak to the railroad station and board a train for the East. After that one might as well hunt for a needle in a haystack as to expect to overhaul him."

"He's a measley scamp, if there ever was one. That money won't do him any good."

"Perhaps not, but that will give my father very little satisfaction."

"I wish we could get out of this hole."

"I wish so, too."

"How fast do you suppose we're going?"

"We're floating away from Westgate at the rate of three or four miles an hour, I should think."

"What time do you think it is?"

"Around two o'clock."

"If nobody boards this derelict, we're likely to float all the way to Chester," said Joe.

"Yes, and even beyond."

"It will be long after dark before we reach that town at this rate."

"There's no doubt about that."

"As we haven't had our dinners, we'll be pretty hungry long before we get there," growled Joe. "I'm feeling peckish already."

"I'm not thinking about my stomach—it's the probable loss of the money that worries me."

"I don't blame you. It's a big sum to lose."

"If we could only get out of this part of the hold, we might find a chance somehow of overtaking that rascal, though I suppose he's out of sight by this time."

"We must keep a bright lookout for people along the banks—you watch out of that window and I'll look out of this—wave our handkerchief and yell when we see any one near the shore. That seems to be our only show."

"We'll do that, but these holes are so plaguey small that at a hundred yards or so we're not likely to be seen."

"They could see the handkerchief all right."

"But would the meaning of the signal be understood? The waving of a handkerchief is more of a salute than anything else, and that's the way folks take it."

"We could attract their attention first with the handkerchief and then yell for help."

"Even if they understood that we were in a tight box, how could any one reach us from the bank unless he had a boat handy?"

"That's so," replied Joe, with a glum look. "I didn't think of that."

"Well, don't be discouraged. We're not going to give up the ship just because things look a bit bad. Never say die, is my motto."

"Let's make another attack on the door," said Joe.

They battered away at it with great energy until they saw that it was simply useless work on their part.

"Nothing short of a battering-ram will have any effect on that slide," said Bob. "I wonder how that rascal fastened it?"

"Give it up. I guess it's held by a hasp and staple arrangement. It shakes, you can see."

"However it's fastened beats me. Let's take a look at the bulkhead that separates this place from the main hold. If we could find a weak board we might be able to batter our way through."

"That would be all right if the hatchway is open."

An examination failed to disclose any weak board, nor was there a knothole through which they could peer into the space beyond.

Then they fell to examining the two cupboards in the cuddy.

One of them was empty, the other held a few broken dishes, a stout gimlet, a fishing line with several hooks attached, a broken knife, and various odds and ends of no value.

"If we could bore enough holes in that door in a circle with this gimlet we might be able to knock a piece out large enough to put an arm through and thus reach the staple, if it is a staple that's holding the old thing," said Joe.

"Judging from the apparent thickness of the door, that would be an all-day job," replied Bob. "However, you might try one hole and see how thick the wood really is."

Joe tackled the job and worked away for a while like a good fellow while Bob kept his eye on the shore through each window alternately.

"There's one hole done," said Joe. "The wood is about an inch thick, but hard grained. I hardly think it will pay to keep on."

"We're drifting over toward the north shore," said Bob. "It isn't impossible but we may run aground at one of the turns in the river."

Joe put the gimlet in his pocket and stood beside his companion watching the shore as it drew closer.

Well-tilled farms were in evidence in this direction; and they could see men at work some distance away.

Farm houses dotted the landscape here and there, and horses and cattle were to be made out in the meadows.

Over all lay the brilliant afternoon sunshine.

Under different circumstances the scene would have interested the two boys.

"Suppose this old hulk was to spring a leak and go down, where would we be at?" asked Joe, suddenly.

"At the bottom of the river," replied Bob, with a faint chuckle.

At that moment the boat swung around a bend and was swept within ten feet of the banks.

"If some boy was only down here fishing or swimming, now," said Joe, "we could easily attract his notice and get him to free us."

"If is a small word, but oh, my! it does make a great figure in the world. If Steve Fowler hadn't stolen my father's money, we wouldn't be in this fix."

"If Steve hadn't stolen the money, we wouldn't have been at his cottage to save his children and his home. The wicked reap the reward sometimes while the good get it in the neck."

"I only hope he'll get it in the neck before he gets clear off."

"No such good luck, I'm afraid."

The flatboat began to recede from the shore again.

"We're going back into the middle of the river once more," said Joe.

"I see we are. I'll bet if we were on a pleasure jaunt we'd see a dozen boys scattered along the bank. When a fellow wants anything badly, that's the time he doesn't get it."

"I've noticed that fact before," replied Joe. "Say, how

long have we been on the river, anyway? It seems like hours."

"Not over an hour, I guess."

"I'm getting deuced hungry, do you know?"

"Are you? Then tighten your belt. I've heard that is a good antidote."

"I don't wear a belt," growled Joe.

"Then you'll have to grin and bear it."

"Aren't you hungry, too?"

"Not so much; but if I had father's money in my pocket now, I'll bet I'd be as hungry as a hunter."

Another hour passed and still not a soul did they see within easy distance of the stream, which had now narrowed down to a width of less than a hundred yards across, and seemed to be getting as crooked as a ram's horn.

At one time they'd be within a yard or two of the bank on one side and then the current would sweep them close to the opposite shore.

It became a matter of wonder to them that the old boat didn't go aground somewhere at one of the many turns.

Several times the boat did strike an obstruction, but its progress was in no way retarded.

The position of the sun in the sky plainly showed that the afternoon was drawing to its close, though it would still be light for several hours.

Sometimes the shore presented a thickly wooded aspect and then again the fields and pastures stretched away on both sides.

At length the river grew still narrower and they appeared to be sailing through a good-sized wood.

Suddenly, as they swung around a bend, they saw two men, not over well dressed, seated on a log near the water's edge.

Each had a paper bundle on his knee, the contents of which they were eating.

They caught sight of the flatboat as it swept toward them, and at first they regarded it with some interest; but perceiving that it appeared to be old and abandoned they did not bother further with it.

The boys were about to hail them when the nose of the craft hit a projecting bit of the bank ahead and suddenly came to a stop.

The end the boys were in—that is, the after part—slowly swung inward until it finally rested against the bank right under the spot where the two men sat.

"Sing out, Bob," said Joe, in some excitement at their anticipated liberation. "These fellows will let us out in a jiffy."

Bob put his face against the opening to do so when he heard one of the men say something to the other that stopped him.

"Why don't you shout?" said Joe in his ear.

"Hush!" replied Bob, turning his head partly around so that his ear was against the opening, and grasping his astonished friend by the arm.

"What's the matter?" quivered Joe.

Bob merely held up his hand for silence.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH PERSEVERANCE CONQUERS.

"We ought to be able to make a good haul out of Graham's Mill to-night," Bob heard one of the men say.

"To-morrow is pay-day, and it's the treasurer's custom to go over to Centerville the afternoon before, draw the money, and then keep it in the safe in the office overnight. We've just learned that the regular watchman is sick, and it's more than likely some greenhorn will be on guard. That will make things easier for us. Pay-day being every two weeks, there ought to be a good wad in the safe to-night, and we've got the tools that'll whistle it open in no time."

"I agree with you, Jackson," said the other. "The village hain't had a robbery for years, and the people don't expect nothin' of the kind is likely to happen. Although the place has taken a boom on, and seems likely to spread itself to some extent before long, they hain't made no provision yet for raisin' more constables. The two who now attend to the night duty are slower than molasses. At the present moment Riverdale is a regular cinch for a pair of experienced chaps like us."

"That's what it is, Billings," replied Jackson, complacently. "It oughtn't to take us more'n an hour to get into that safe, and then with the boodle in our clothes we'll skip out for Chicago and enjoy life while the rhino lasts."

"With the proceeds of the Chester job in our grips, which we'll be able to pawn in Chicago without danger, and \$1,000 to \$1,500 in bills from the mill safe, we ought to be able to live high for the next three or four months."

"You kin bet we will," said Jackson, taking out his pipe, filling it and striking a light, an example immediately followed by his companion.

"That there factory couldn't be in a better spot for our purpose," remarked Billings. "It's quite isolated from the regular part of town."

"It is at present, but it won't be for long. The railroad is buildin' a branch that will soon be finished, and six months from now there will be a dozen more manufacturin' establishments all around the Graham Mill."

"We kin come back then and make another haul," chuckled his companion.

"We'll think about that later on. Say, pard, is that a boat hauled up in them bushes?"

"Whereabouts?"

"Down there. Don't you see it?"

"I see it now. Sure it's a boat."

"I wonder what it's doin' there? It should be just the thing for us to take charge of. When we've cracked the crib we could row up to Westlake in it and take the first train in the mornin' East from there."

"That will be just the thing. What luck!" replied Billings. "We'd better hide it somewheres else, so that if the owner comes back lookin' for it to-night he won't find it."

"All right. You're younger than me, so just you attend to it while I finish my smoke."

Billings accordingly got up, and Bob heard him moving away.

Ten minutes of silence followed, during which Bob whispered the gist of the conversation he had just overheard to Joe, and warned him to remain quite still.

When Billings returned he told his companion where he had hidden the boat among some rushes a hundred yards away.

At this moment Bob noticed that the flatboat was working away from the bank.

It was only the stern that moved, however, and very slowly at that.

As the legs of the two crooks came into the lad's range of vision above on the bank, Bob overheard the man Jackson say:

"Hist! There's some one comin' this way. It may be the owner of the boat. We'd better hide."

The rascals rose and concealed themselves among the tall bushes near at hand.

As the flatboat swung further off Bob, to his great astonishment, saw Steve Fowler appear from among the trees with a bundle under his arm.

He sat down on a rock within a yard or two of the spot where the crooks had vanished, and without appearing to notice the flatboat, opened the bundle and began to eat something that was in it.

Bob and Joe watched him furtively from their prison pen.

"He stopped here to buy something to eat at the village beyond—Riverdale, one of those rascals called it. I'll bet that was his boat the crook took possession of and hid further away. He'll find himself stranded here now. If we were only able to get out of this place, we could take him by surprise and get the money away from him without trouble. I'd just as soon lay him out with a clip over the head with a stone as look at him."

They watched Steve eat his meal with considerable appetite, and the operation made Joe hungrier than ever, though it did not have the same effect on Bob.

Although neither was aware of the fact, two other pair of eyes were on Fowler at the same time.

The eyes, as the reader will surmise, belonged to the crooks who had temporarily withdrawn from the scene.

"If those rascals who just left knew that Steve had \$1,200 in his clothes, I guess they wouldn't leave it long in his possession," whispered Joe.

"I'll bet they wouldn't," returned Bob. "His advantage is that he doesn't look like a capitalist. No one to look at him would imagine he had any money to speak of."

"I should say not. He looks like a tramp more than anything else."

Steve continued to eat until he had satisfied his appetite, then he rolled up the remainder of his provender and placed the package at his feet.

After taking a cautious survey of the neighborhood he placed his hand inside of his undershirt and drew out Mr. Channing's black pocketbook.

Bob and Joe watched this action on his part with eager interest.

"That's my father's wallet," whispered Bob, excitedly.

"He's opening it," replied Joe. "Going to count the money, I'll bet."

That was evidently Steve's intention.

He took the bills out of the wallet and, laying them across his knee, began to go over them one by one, moistening his fingers as he proceeded.

While he was thus engaged the boys saw the boat parted behind him and the heads of the two crooks appear.

"Great Scott!" gasped Bob. "There's those rascals now watching him. They'll do him up for that money as sure as fate."

Joe was of the same opinion, though he said nothing in reply.

After the crooks had fully satisfied themselves that Fowler had a bunch of money in his possession, they stealthily advanced upon him from behind and suddenly pounced upon him.

He was taken completely by surprise, and the money and pocketbook fell to the grass.

Then the man Jackson struck him on the head with the butt of his revolver, which he had drawn for the purpose, and Steve was knocked out for fair, dropping like an ox in the shambles.

Billings stooped and grabbed up the scattered notes which, without counting, he crammed into his pocket.

The rascals then picked up a pair of large grips, which had been hidden in the grass, and, leaving their victim on the ground, silently took their way through the wood, disappearing from the boys' sight.

Bob and Joe turned and looked at each other.

"Your father's money is in worse hands than it was before," said Joe. "You've seen the last of it now."

"I don't know about that," replied Bob, drawing a long breath. "Those rascals are going to remain in this vicinity for some hours yet, for they intend to burglarize the Graham Mill at Riverdale. We must make another strenuous effort to get out of the hold."

"I don't see how we're going to do it. We've already done our best and failed. We can't crawl out of these six-inch square windows. I'm ready to try anything you say, but I'm afraid we're cooped up here for an indefinite stay. The worst of it is, we're anchored in this beastly wood, which makes our chances all the slimmer."

Bob made no answer, but a look of determination came over his features.

He drew back opposite the slide as far as he could, then rushed at it and planted his foot against the fastened end with all the force he could muster.

The door shivered, but did not show any sign of yielding.

He repeated this effort several times, and then told Joe to try.

Joe made the door quake and rattle, yet in the end it defied his most sturdy attempts to break it open.

"This is the fiercest proposition I've ever been up against," he said, when he finally threw up the sponge.

"If at first you don't succeed, try once more," said Bob, again making a battering-ram out of his foot.

The continuous falling of a drop of water in one place on a stone, however hard, will in time wear out a hole.

So the steady lambasting the door got from the boys weakened the lower slide until finally one of Joe's kicks demolished the outer edge of it completely and the door yielded at the corner where the force had been mostly applied.

This success encouraged the boys to keep up the good work, and as it is a known fact that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so strong as the door still was to the main, the effort to hold it closed wholly on the lower edge failed only the second end.

The boys went forward in a more earnestness, and it soon came to pass that under every blow, bending and twisting the hasp out of shape.

With intervals for rest, the boys banged away for more than an hour, for it seemed to be the only avenue of escape from the cuddy.

At length a tremendous kick from Joe's foot completed the demoralization of the slide.

It flew upward, snapping the hasp in two.

"Eureka!" yelled Joe, seizing the bottom of the door and pushing it outward until the upper slide snapped off.

"Now, altogether!" cried Craig. "Push out with all your might, Bob."

Their united muscle snapped the door off at the other end, and it fell on to the deck, leaving the way to freedom clear before them.

Joe sprang out on deck, quickly followed by Bob.

"Free at last!" cried the latter, exultantly.

CHAPTER VII.

TRYING TO PREVENT A CRIME.

"Gee! It feels good to be out of that hole," said Joe, expanding his chest and inhaling a deep breath; "but oh, boy, I believe I'm crippled for life," and he limped up and down the deck of the flatboat.

Bob was also sensible that his right leg was sore and lame from the unusual exercise it had been called upon to perform.

"Let's go ashore and see what shape Steve Fowler is in. He's been lying like a dead man for more than an hour. I hope they didn't injure him so seriously that he won't recover."

Steve was beginning to recover his senses when they reached him, and they concluded to let him complete the operation.

It was just sundown and Bob said they had better go on to Riverdale as fast as they could and see about checking the two crooks.

"We'll notify Mr. Graham as soon as we find out where he lives that an attempt is to be made to-night to rob the office safe. Then it will be up to him to figure out how the rascals may be captured. If they are coppered, I'll stand a first-class show of getting my father's money back, and then our afternoon's adventure will not have been without result."

"We can't reach the village any too quick to suit me," replied Joe. "I'm almost famished. I could make a square meal disappear quicker than a conjuror makes a pack of cards vanish. I'm hungry enough to tackle a board-house steak, and they say that's the toughest thing on record."

"I think I could do something in the eating line myself," answered Bob, as they started off in the direction of a distant church spire which they believed indicated the village of Riverdale.

They soon found that they had a stiff walk before them, for they had to cross several fields before they came to the road that led to the village.

By the time they reached the turnpike they had worked their lameness off, and they now made better speed.

As they drew near a farmhouse close to the road, Joe suggested that they stop there and buy a few slices of bread and a glass of milk apiece to appease their appetites a little.

Bob agreed, as he wanted to make some inquiries.

So they marched up to the farmhouse and stated their wants to the good-natured woman who answered their knock.

When she learned that they hadn't eaten anything since morning, she told them to walk right into the kitchen and she would let them have some meat and bread, an apple pie, and all the milk they could drink.

At her words Joe rolled his eyes in an ecstasy of delight.

They were soon seated at the table, and the way the meat and bread disappeared from their plates was a caution.

"You are hungry, aren't you?" said the woman.

"Hungry!" gurgled Joe. "Don't mention it. I'm so hungry I can hardly stop to chew. Pass that milk jug, Bob. Gee! that pie looks good. I'd rather have a slice of that than the deed to a hundred-acre farm."

The woman cut the pie in quarters and told the boys to help themselves.

Joe got the first slice, and every crumb vanished like the dew on the grass before the morning sun.

Then he tackled a second slice.

While he was eating it the farmer came into the room, and Bob asked him if the village ahead was Riverdale.

The agriculturalist said it was.

"Can you tell me where Graham's Mill is?"

"It's about a mile from here down the road, and half a mile this side of the village," replied the farmer.

"There are no houses near it, are there?"

"No. It sets off from the road by itself."

"Kind of a lonesome spot at night, isn't it?"

The farmer nodded.

"Where does Mr. Graham, the proprietor of the mill, live?"

"You're going on to the village, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then you're bound to pass his house before you get there. He lives in a fine mansion near the junction of the county road and Main Street. It's surrounded by a lawn and has an observatory on top."

"Thank you," said Bob. "I guess that is all I wish to know."

A few minutes afterward the boys took their leave of the hospitable farmer and his wife, who refused to take any pay for the food they had so generously furnished the lads.

"I feel like a fighting cock now," said Joe, when they were on the road once more. "I could have eaten twice as much, but what we had went to the right spot."

"That's right. An empty stomach kind of takes all the enthusiasm out of a fellow."

"I should say that it does."

"It will be dark before we reach the mill."

"Are you going to stop there?"

"No. I'm going straight on to see Mr. Graham."

Dusk was rapidly fading into the darker shades of night when they came in sight of the mill, which stood about a hundred yards back from the road.

With a line of woods a short distance in the rear and not a house within a radius of a quarter of a mile, it certainly did look lonesome at that hour.

It was a three-story frame structure, with numerous windows for the admission of light and air, and a small brick ell that the boys easily judged to be the engine-room, for a tall black smokestack projected through its roof.

There was no fence surrounding it like that of the Westgate Woolen Mills, where Bob's father was employed, so that one could walk right up to the building from any point of the compass.

A solitary light shone from a window on the ground floor at one corner.

The boys afterward found out that this was the office.

"I guess there is no one on the premises now but the watchman," remarked Bob, as they tramped past. "It certainly strikes me as an easy place to rob, provided the thieves have the tools and the experience with which to break into the safe."

Joe agreed with him, and said he wondered the owners would keep a large sum of money in what was probably an ordinary safe so far outside the village with only a single watchman to guard it.

"Oh, it's safe enough under the general run of conditions in village neighborhoods. Professional cracksmen very seldom are attracted to such small places as Riverdale. Tramps and such scalawags are about the only dangerous characters that float around here, and they couldn't open a safe if they knew there was a million dollars inside of it. It takes tools and expert knowledge to get the best of any kind of a modern safe, and the one at the mill is probably a good one, if it isn't a large one. The two crooks we are trying to run down appear to be professionals provided with the tools that will make short work of any ordinary safe. They drifted to Chester somehow, robbed a house or two there, by their own admission, and while in the town learned something about Graham's Mill. Then they came on to the village, reconnoitered the ground, learned further particulars that decided them to make the attempt on the mill to-night. No doubt they were in hiding in the wood where we saw them all afternoon."

"Now that they've got hold of that \$1,200 belonging to your father, they might give up the mill enterprise and light out."

"Don't you believe it. They look upon the mill job as a dead open-and-shut game. They don't expect to have the least trouble in getting away with the money they expect to find in the safe."

"Then it's a pretty sure thing that they'll go there to-night."

"I'd be willing to gamble on it."

"At about what time?"

"I didn't hear them mention any time, but I dare say they'll start in early, as the place is so lonesome; for the sooner they get through the more time they'll have to get away before they calculate the discovery of the robbery will be made."

"At that rate there isn't any time to be lost in arranging for their capture."

"Well, they probably will not get down to business before ten o'clock. I dare say they figure on taking a couple of hours to do the job. It is now somewhere around half-past seven, I judge. There's the house with the observatory yonder. That's where Mr. Graham lives. It won't take me long to put him wise to the situation."

"If you find him at home."

"The chances are he's at home."

Five minutes later the two boys entered the front gate and walked up the gravel walk to the veranda of the Graham residence.

Bob rang the bell, and after an interval a servant opened the door about six inches, or as far as a steel chain would permit, and asked who was there.

"Is Mr. Graham at home?" asked Bob.

"No," replied the servant, "he is not at home."

"Too bad!" said the boy in a tone of great disappointment. "I wanted to see him on business of the greatest importance."

"Who sent you?"

"Nobody sent me. Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Graham? It is positively necessary that I see him as soon as possible."

"Who is there, Maria?" asked a girlish voice at that juncture.

"Two boys who want to see your father on important business," replied the servant.

"Who are they?"

"I don't know, miss. Shall I ask their names?"

"Certainly. If we know them let them in, and I will talk to them."

"My name is Bob Channing. My friend here is Joe Craig. We live in Westlake."

The servant repeated this reply to the young lady, who, full of curiosity as to the mission of the young strangers, came to the door and looked out at them.

As it was dark outside she could see little more than their outlines.

"What is your business with my father?" asked Miss Graham, looking at the indistinct figure of Bob.

"It is very important, miss. It concerns the mill."

"The mill!" she exclaimed, with a tremor in her voice. "There is nothing wrong there, I hope?"

"Nothing at present, I believe, but there will be in a couple of hours or so unless I can see your father and warn him."

"My gracious!" cried the girl. "Bring a lamp, Maria. Excuse me, Mr. —"

"Channing," said Bob.

"Excuse me, Mr. Channing, for not admitting you, but it is necessary that we be cautious at night when my father is away. You say you are from Westlake?"

"Yes, miss."

"And you came from there to see my father?"

"No, miss. I suppose I might as well tell you the truth, though it will probably startle you. The reason I wish to see your father is because I have found out that the mill office is to be broken into to-night and the safe robbed."

The young girl uttered a suppressed scream at this startling intelligence.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

Maria now appeared with the lamp, and the girl taking it out of her hand held it above her head so that the light would fall full upon the two boys.

As they looked at the thoroughly respectable and honest, Miss Graham was reassured and decided to admit them.

Accordingly the chain was let down, the door opened, and the boys invited to enter, which they did.

The girl led them into the dining-room and then introduced herself as Gertie Graham, the mill owner's only daughter.

She was an uncommonly pretty and winsome girl, and that fact immediately impressed itself on both of the young visitors.

Bob having constituted himself spokesman, a position not disputed by Joe, who always considered himself as second fiddle where his chum was concerned, Miss Gertie naturally bestowed most of her attention on him.

She saw that he was a good-looking, manly boy, with an engaging address, and she took an immediate liking for him.

"Now, Mr. Channing, will you explain matters to me? You say that you found out a robbery is to be committed at the mill to-night?"

"Yes, Miss Graham."

"How did you happen to discover this plot? Do you know who the men are?"

Bob, before replying, glanced at the gilt clock on the mantel and saw that it was on the stroke of eight.

"To make you thoroughly understand all the circumstances, I'd have to tell you what brought me and my friend, Joe Craig, to this neighborhood. I'm afraid that would take more time than we can afford to lose, for there is no telling when the two rascals, who I can assure you positively are professional crooks, may get to work at the mill, and I have as much interest in having them captured as your father can have. They have in their possession \$1,200 belonging to my father, and I am very anxious to recover that money."

"My father and mother have gone to Chester to visit my aunt, who is very ill. The best thing that I can do will be to telephone the head constable, and have him come over here. I will tell him to stop on the way at the homes of the two foremen of the mill, and also at Mr. Black the treasurer's house, and to bring any other help he can pick up," said Gertie Graham, rising from her chair.

"That will answer first rate," replied Bob. "If we can get half a dozen men together, Joe and I will make eight. That ought to be force enough to capture the rascals, particularly if we can take them by surprise, as I should like to do."

The young lady at once called up the head constable at his house, which adjoined the village lock-up, and got the officer's wife on the wire.

She said that her husband was out, but she thought she knew where he was and would send for him at once.

Gertie replied that the matter was of the utmost importance, and that if she was unable to find her husband right away she must ring up Squire Hogan and tell him that Miss Graham wanted to talk with him.

"I can't do anything more till either the constable or the justice rings me up," said the girl, hanging up the receiver.

"While we are waiting I will tell you as much of my story as I can," replied Bob, beginning at once to recount

in as few words as possible how his father had been robbed of all his savings that morning by his fireman at the Westgate Mill; how he had started in pursuit of the thief, run across Joe, and how they had arrived at the Fowler home in time to save the rascal's children and his cottage from the flames.

Then he went on to state how Fowler had overcome both Joe and himself, twiddled them into the caddy, or after hold, of the flatboat, and then sent them adrift on the river, and how they had floated down the stream for the greater part of the afternoon until the boat was stranded among the shallows of the woods a good three miles to the southwest of Riverdale.

The girl listened to his story with great interest and attention.

He was just on the point of introducing the crooks into his narrative when the telephone bell rang, and Miss Gertie got up to answer it.

The head constable was on the wire, and the girl soon put him in possession of all necessary particulars, told him what she wanted him to do, and advised the utmost haste.

The officer promised to be over as soon as he could with a force sufficient to grapple with the situation.

Gertie Graham told Bob what the constable said, and then asked him to go on with his story.

The boy took up the thread of his narrative at the point where the two crooks came on the scene, and told the girl how he had overheard their plans concerning the proposed robbery of her father's mill that night.

Then he told her how Fowler had appeared and how the rascals had knocked him out and taken the \$1,200 away from him.

After that he detailed the strenuous efforts, finally successful, of Joe and himself to break out of their floating prison.

"Then we came on here to notify your father, getting the location of your home from a farmer along the road, who treated us to supper."

"I think you had a most remarkable experience, Mr. Channing," said Miss Graham. "My father will feel, when he comes home and learns all, that he is under the greatest of obligations to you. From your story I can easily see that the mill is at the mercy of those thieves, and that but for your promptness in coming here to-night the mill office would no doubt be found robbed in the morning. It seems strange to me that those men should have been able to learn that Mr. Black, our treasurer, drew the money to pay off with from the Centerville Bank this afternoon. I don't know how much money is in the office safe, but it is over \$1,000 at any rate. I hope when the rascals are caught that they will have your father's money on them so that you will get it back."

"There isn't much doubt but they'll have it, Miss Graham," said Bob. "They've also got a lot of stuff in their grips that they stole in Chester. This can be returned to the owner if we succeed in rounding up the scamps."

At this juncture there came a loud ring at the front door bell.

Maria, the servant, went to the door and admitted Constable Howard, Treasurer Black, the two foremen of the mill, and one of the night watch.

Bob immediately told them such particulars as he considered necessary, and advised instant action.

Constable Howard and Mr. Black agreed that no time should be lost, and so after the boys had bidden Miss Graham good-night, and Bob particularly had been invited by her to call back in the morning if he and his friend remained overnight in the village, as it was very likely they would be obliged to do, the party took up its line of march for the mill.

It was now nine o'clock, and they lost no time in covering the intervening half mile.

The lamp was still burning in the mill office when they came in sight of the place, and a halt was called under the shadow of a big oak tree to determine how they ought to proceed.

"It is quite possible that those rascals are hanging around the neighborhood at this moment waiting until they think the time is ripe for them to force their entrance into the mill," said Bob. "If they should see us walk to the building in a body, that would certainly scare them off and we should have no chance at all to catch them. I think it would be better for us to remain right here and watch. We can't fail to see them when they approach the mill, and they will be unaware of our presence. My idea is to let them get into the building. Then two of us can post ourselves in front of the office and two in the rear. That will cut off their retreat. Mr. Howard, his deputy, and either Mr. Black or myself will then enter and overpower them while they are engaged at the safe."

Bob's proposition was voted the most prudent and effective plan for capturing the crooks, and was decided on.

The seven stretched themselves out on the ground and awaited developments.

Nothing happened to break the monotony of their watch for nearly two hours, and the party were showing signs of impatience when Joe suddenly called attention to two figures slouching from the wood in the rear of the mill.

"Here they come now," he said, in a tone of suppressed excitement, and in an instant the seven watchers were on the alert ready for business.

The rascals carried each a good-sized grip in his right hand, and they drew near the mill with some caution.

Finally they halted and held a consultation; then one, leaving his bag with his companion, advanced and proceeded to reconnoiter the office through the windows.

After a time he made some sign to his confederate and the other came forward.

They halted at the employees' entrance to the mill, and one of them producing a jimmy proceeded to force the door, which he effected without much trouble.

Taking their grips with them, they disappeared inside the building.

"We'd better give them time enough to capture the watchman and get down to work," said Bob. "Then we'll creep up and take them by surprise."

Constable Howard nodded, and no move was made for a matter of about twenty minutes.

At the end of that time the constable directed the advance to be made.

Joe and one of the foremen were stationed outside the front door.

Treasurer Black and the other foreman took their places

at the rear of the building, while the two officers, with drawn revolvers, accompanied by Bob, entered by the employees' entrance.

With great caution they made their way through the lower floor to the door communicating with the office, which was shut.

Constable Howard turned the knob, opened the door an inch or two, and looked in.

The two crooks were at work on the safe.

Throwing the door wide open, the three rushed inside, the two officers covering the rascals with their revolvers.

"Throw up your hands or we'll perforate you on the spot!" cried Constable Howard, sternly.

Jackson and Billings, taken by surprise, looked into the frowning muzzles of the weapons and, realizing that the game was up, sullenly yielded.

"Take my revolver and cover that scamp nearest the safe," said the chief constable to Bob.

Then the officer, who was a six-footer and wore a very determined look, walked forward and handcuffed the rascals together.

"Turn out their pockets," said Bob. "I want my father's \$1,200."

Nearly \$900 was found on each of the prisoners, and the constable took charge of it.

Bob then learned that his father would not be able to get his money until after the crooks were tried at Chester.

"I will turn the money and the two grips over to the court, where they will remain until the case against these chaps has been decided. Then your father can put in his claim for his \$1,200, accompanied by your sworn statement of the circumstances. I should also advise you to get an affidavit from the fireman who stole the pocketbook from your father, if he hasn't made himself scarce to avoid arrest for the theft. Now, gentlemen, we'll march our prisoners to the lock-up. You boys can spend the night at the inn. You will have to give your evidence before the justice in the morning. In order that your parents may learn where you are, for doubtless they are greatly worried over your disappearance by this time, I'll telephone to the Westgate police and ask them to notify your people that you are both safe here in Riverdale."

The watchman was found bound and gagged under a table in the office, and was liberated.

Then the entire party took up its line of march for the village.

CHAPTER IX.

BOB AND JOE RETURN TO WESTLAKE.

Bob and Joe were quartered at the Riverdale Inn that night, and next morning the head constable called for them and piloted them to the office of Justice Hogan, before whom the two crooks were arraigned on the charge of the attempted burglary of Graham's Mill.

The boys gave their evidence, the constables testified to catching the rascals at work on the safe, the watchman explained how they had come upon him unawares and gagged and bound him, while Treasurer Black and the two mill foremen stated what they knew about the crime.

Jackson and Billings refused to make any statement in

their own behalf, and were remanded by the justice for trial at Chester at the next term of the court.

Constable Howard communicated with the Chester police and ascertained that the home of the president of the Chester Bank had recently been broken into and \$5,000 worth of jewelry and about \$600 in money stolen.

A reward of \$500 had been offered by the banker for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the thieves.

A description of the jewelry furnished by the Chester authorities tallied with the contents of the grips taken from Jackson and Billings, and left no doubt in the mind of the constable that the men he had captured were the rascals who had robbed the banker's home.

He notified the Chester police to that effect and claimed the reward in behalf of Bob Channing and his friend, Joe Craig.

Miss Graham, who attended the examination of the crooks at the justice's office, invited Bob and Joe to return to her father's home with her and take lunch previous to their departure for Westlake.

The invitation was accepted.

Miss Gertie paid especial attention to Bob, to whom it was evident she had taken a fancy, and that young man met her advances more than half way.

During lunch Bob spoke about the boom that appeared to have struck the village, and remarked that Riverdale was likely soon to become a lively place.

Gertie coincided with him, and in the course of the conversation mentioned the fact that her father was about to establish a bank in the village.

When she learned that Bob and Joe, at the end of their vacation, were going to look up situations for themselves, she said that she was sure her father would be pleased to give them an opening in the bank if they would come to Riverdale.

The boys said they would consider an offer of that kind. Mr. Graham made it to them, but Bob added that he would rather go into business on his own account if it were possible for him to get a start.

Gertie wanted to know what kind of business attracted him, and he told her what his plans were if he was in a position to carry them out.

She was immediately interested in his scheme, and said she had no doubt her father would gladly help him to reach the goal of his ambition.

At this point a friend of Miss Graham's called to see her, and she was introduced to the boys as Miss Bettie Martin, a niece of Justice Hogan's.

She was quite an attractive brunette, and Joe Craig was rather smitten with her charms.

Miss Bettie seemed equally interested in Joe, so the four young people seemed well paired.

The boys forgot their intention of returning to Westgate right after lunch, and prolonged their stay.

At two o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Graham returned from Chester.

Gertie introduced Bob and Joe, and told her parents a few general particulars of the attempted robbery at the mill which had been frustrated by Bob's timely interference.

Bob then told his story all over again.

The mill owner expressed the obligation he felt under to the lads, especially Bob, whom he recognized as the leading spirit of the affair, and assured them that he would testify his appreciation in a substantial way.

Bob replied that as far as he was concerned he was not looking for any reward for doing what he regarded as his plain duty, especially as he had had a strong personal interest on behalf of his father in securing the capture of the crooks.

"But I have no doubt you would have been just as eager to warn me last night even if you had had no personal interest in the arrest of the thieves," said Mr. Graham.

"That's quite true, sir," admitted Bob.

The boys politely refused an invitation to remain to dinner, and then Mr. Graham had his coachman take them back to Westlake in his automobile.

Before they left Bob promised Gertie that he would come over soon and pay her a visit, and Joe told Miss Bettie that he would try and do the same.

The parents of both boys, although their anxiety over their unexplained absence had been relieved the preceding night by Constable Howard through the Westlake police department, were much mystified as to the object that had taken their sons to Riverdale.

"Why, Bob, what in the name of goodness took you and Joe Craig to Riverdale?" exclaimed his mother when he entered the cottage.

"Important business, mother, although we did not exactly go most of the way of our own free will," he answered, smilingly.

"We heard that you and Joe saved the cottage of Steve Fowler from burning down, and also the lives of his three children."

"That's right, mother."

"And they say Steve was there himself at the time."

"He was, mother."

"And what about your father's money that Steve stole? Couldn't you get him to give it up after what you did?"

"No, mother. As soon as the fire was out he started to make off, before Joe and I could corner him; then—but I'll tell you the whole story from start to finish, and then you'll understand better how things stand. Where's father?"

"He hasn't got home yet. I expect he's gone over to the police office to see if any word has been received about Steve."

"He can let Steve go now. The rascal hasn't got the money."

"Hasn't got the money! What do you mean? Did you succeed in getting it away from him?"

"Not exactly, mother; but I think father will have no trouble in recovering it, for it is now in the hands of the Chester police."

"Then Steve has been arrested?"

"Not that I know of, mother; but just listen to my story and you will get wise to the situation. It's a bit complicated as far as father's money is concerned, but it will come out all right in the end."

Bob then began at the beginning, which was at the engine-room of the Westlake Mills, and told his mother all that happened to him and Joe the preceding afternoon,

growing out of his effort to overtake Steve Fowler and get his father's money back.

He had about finished his narration when his father came in, an hour later than his customary time.

"Well, young man," said Mr. Channing, gloomily, "what have you to say for yourself? What took you to Riverdale, with Joe Craig, yesterday afternoon, and kept you there the greater part of to-day?"

"An effort to recover your money was the cause of it, father," replied Bob.

"I suppose I needn't ask you what luck you've had? The police have not found any trace of Steve Fowler—the rascal!—so it's hardly to be supposed that you discovered any trace of him, after letting him get away from you at the fire where it has been reported that you saved his cottage and the lives of three of his children."

"You needn't worry about Steve any more," replied Bob.

"Why not?" asked his father, sharply.

"Because your money is out of his hands."

"It is? Explain yourself. Do you know where my money is?"

"I do."

"You do!" exclaimed Mr. Channing, growing excited. "Where is it?"

"In the hands of the Chester police department."

"Then Steve was arrested in Chester? Funny that the chief of our police told me less than half an hour ago that Steve had not been heard of."

"Steve was not arrested in Chester."

"Then what do you mean by saying that the Chester police have my money? How could they have it unless——"

"Let me tell you my story and then you'll understand," said Bob.

"Go ahead," said Mr. Channing, looking hard at his son.

"Supper is ready," said Mrs. Channing at this point.

Bob and his father drew their chairs up to the table, and between bites Bob went all over his adventures again.

Mr. Channing listened with interest and growing expectation as the narrative developed.

He grew quite excited at the point where Bob described the knocking-out of Steve Fowler by the two crooks, and their taking possession of his money.

From that point on Mr. Channing showed eager attention right up to the point where Bob detailed the capture of the two rascals at the mill.

Then Bob told him what Constable Howard had said about the disposition of the money and valuables taken from the two crooks.

"You'd better write to the Chester authorities at once and put in your claim. I'll write out a statement, showing how the crooks got your money into their hands, and Joe and I will swear to it before a notary. You can send it on with your letter. When the trial comes off, Joe and I will have to go to Chester anyhow to testify, and that will clinch your right to the \$1,200."

Mr. Channing regarded Bob with a proud and approving look.

A great load had been suddenly lifted from his mind.

There was every chance now that he would in time re-

cover the money he had almost given up as lost to him forever.

"Bob," he said, with emotion, "the next hundred dollars I save shall be yours as a nest egg for your future."

"Thank you, father. Mr. Graham has promised to give me—and Joe, of course, too—something for saving the mill from being robbed; and Constable Howard, of Riverdale, said that we are entitled to the \$500 reward offered for the capture of the thieves who robbed the residence of Mr. Baldwin, president of the Chester Bank. He said he put in a claim for it in our names. So you see, father, I'm likely to have a little capital before long."

"You are richly entitled to every cent you get in connection with this affair. Don't you think so, Clara?" he said, turning to his wife.

"I do, indeed, Richard," she answered, beaming on her stalwart boy.

"Father," said Bob, after a pause, "I wish you could see your way to moving to Riverdale. You might be able to get charge of the engine-room of one of the new mills at more money than you're getting here."

"Why?" asked Mr. Channing, in some surprise.

"Well, father, as I've got to get out and hustle in a few weeks, I think there is a better chance for me to get ahead in Riverdale than here."

"What makes you think so?"

"Several reasons. Mr. Graham is going to start a bank in the village in a little while, and I'm almost certain of a position there if I will take it."

"Did he make you an offer?"

"No, but his daughter Gertie said that she was sure her father would give me an opening if I asked for it."

"A position in a bank would be better than anything I could get for you here. You had better apply for it. You could come home once a week, at any rate."

"I don't know that I should like to have Bob away from us," objected Mrs. Channing, with motherly solicitude.

"My dear, the boy's future must be considered first of all, whatever sacrifice we may be called on to make for his benefit," said the engineer.

"Then you have no objection to my going to Riverdale?" said Bob, whose ambitious thoughts were mingled with a recollection of Miss Gertie's bright eyes.

"Not if it will be to your advantage, my son. It is only ten miles from here."

"You might sell your interest in this cottage, and secure a position there as soon as the new mills are completed. Mr. Graham, I guess, could secure you the job as engineer to one of them. He wanted to hire you himself once, you told me."

"Bob's suggestion is a good one, Richard," said his wife, who was evidently in favor of such a change now that it seemed likely that her son might go there.

"I will think about it," replied Mr. Channing, in a non-committal way.

Bob having finished his supper, put on his hat and ran around the block to call on Joe Craig, and tell him about the possibility of his going to Riverdale to live, and to propose that Joe also apply for some kind of a job in the new bank.

CHAPTER X.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

"Then you really have made up your mind to ask Mr. Graham for a job in his bank?" said Joe.

"Well, to tell the truth, Joe, I'd rather go into business for myself; but as I am not sure that I can do that, a position in the Riverdale Bank would be better than anything else I know of."

"I mean to ask my father if he'll let me go to Riverdale, too. If he will, you can put in my application with yours to Mr. Graham. You stand better with him than I, for you were really the whole thing last night."

"All right," replied Bob. "It would be fine to have you there, for we could room together and be together after working hours."

"Sure. Then we could call on Miss Graham and Miss Martin. They're nice girls, don't you think?"

"Bet your life they are, but I like Miss Gertie best."

"I'm glad you do, for Miss Bettie takes my eye," grinned Joe.

"That settles it. There is no danger of our becoming rivals."

"Not the slightest, old man."

The boys talked an hour longer about their prospects in Riverdale, and then Bob went home.

About a week later Bob received an invitation from Mr. Graham to come to Riverdale and stay overnight.

The mill owner said his auto would meet Bob at the Centerville station on the arrival of a certain train.

It was about eleven miles by rail from Westlake to Centerville, and the local train covered the distance in twenty-one minutes.

Bob was tickled to death at the chance to meet Gertie Graham, so he told his parents that, with their permission, he was going to Riverdale, at Mr. Graham's invitation, the next afternoon.

When he arrived at Centerville he was surprised and delighted to see Miss Graham seated in the auto.

She had done him the honor to come over and meet him.

Evidently she was taking a great interest in the young Westlaker.

The ride from the station to the Graham home was the most enjoyable Bob thought he had ever taken in his life.

Miss Gertie, who looked charming in her best clothes, bid herself out to entertain him, and Bob tried his best to do his share.

He was cordially welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Graham, and soon after his arrival dinner was announced.

After the meal Mr. Graham took Bob into his library.

"Now, Bob," said the mill owner, "first of all I will hand you Mr. Baldwin's check for \$500 to your order, covering the reward he offered in connection with the robbery which was committed at his residence by the two men whose capture you were conspicuous in bringing about."

"Thank you, sir. Half of this will go to my friend, Joe Craig, who, I think, is equally entitled to participate in it."

"That is for you to decide as you think proper. Now, as far as the saving of my money is concerned, I think

you are entitled to the chief recognition. I have therefore decided to give you \$500, and your friend Craig \$100. Here are the checks on the Centerville Bank."

"I don't think I am entitled to so much," replied Bob, looking at the check to his order, and feeling a certain delicacy about accepting it.

"Allow me to judge of that, my boy," answered the mill owner. "Put them in your pocket."

Bob put the three checks away.

"The next question is, do you want a position in my bank?" said Mr. Graham.

"I should like it very much, sir, provided——"

"What is the proviso?"

"I think I should prefer to start a certain business in this place if, in your opinion, you saw no great obstacles to my ultimate success."

"My daughter spoke to me about that. Let me have your views on the subject."

Bob accordingly submitted his ideas on the matter nearest his heart.

He told the mill owner what kind of business he wanted to engage in, where he desired to establish himself, and just how he proposed to conduct it.

"Of course, I'm handicapped by lack of experience, but Charley Brown, who runs a similar and successful business in Westlake, has promised to coach me as well as he can if I should manage to embark in it. I feel it in my bones that with a fair show I'll make a success of it. Now that Riverdale promises to be a place of no little importance, I want to be the first in the field in my chosen line."

Mr. Graham was much impressed by his enthusiasm and the evident energy of his character.

He saw that the boy's business ideas were good ones, and that really all he needed was the experience.

He decided then and there to help Bob achieve his object.

He would give him the benefit of his influence in the village, and would back him if the little capital he had now secured was not sufficient to give him a proper start.

"Well, Bob," he said, "I think pretty well of your scheme, and I pledge you my support. When do you want to open up?"

"As soon as the railroad is finished and the new station is built."

"That will be within about three months, I think, from present indications. In the meantime I suppose you will start in with your friend Brown and learn all you can about the business?"

"That's just what I mean to do. I'll give him my services in return for his instruction and advice."

"An excellent arrangement. Now, the station is to be built on Main Street, in a prominent location. I sold the ground to the company, but I have a plot alongside of it. I intend to put up a building on it with a double store — one side for the post-office, already spoken for, and the other for the local druggist. Now, instead of the druggist, you shall have the store next to the post-office. So you will have the station on one side and the post-office on the other to draw custom to you."

"That will be fine," exclaimed Bob enthusiastically.

"They will certainly help you, while your store will be in the most prominent situation in Main Street."

"But do you think I'll be able to stand the rent at the start?"

"Don't worry about the rent. We will speak of that later. The main point at issue at present is to give you the chance to establish yourself. There is no regular stationery and periodical store in Riverdale as yet, so you will be the first in the field, as you desire. Your general ideas for drawing custom are good, and I think with your energy and perseverance you will get along. Of course, you will have up-hill work at the start, as the village is a small one as yet, but there will be a great change inside of six months. Four manufacturing establishments are going to be erected and put into operation within that time, and they will employ, I understand, about 2,000 people who will have to live here. I shall have to enlarge my own mills, and hire more help, to keep abreast of the orders that are coming in. All things considered, I don't think you could start out for yourself under more encouraging auspices."

Bob fully agreed with the genial mill owner, and thanked him for the interest he was showing in his behalf.

"Don't mention it, Bob. I have taken a liking for you, and want to give you a boost."

Bob then thought of Joe, and asked Mr. Graham if he would give his friend a position in the bank.

"I will, if only to oblige you. Let me have his name and address."

Bob gave it to him, and then began to speak about having his parents move to Riverdale from Westlake.

"Do you think you could get my father the position as engineer in one of the new mills?" he asked.

"I think I made your father an offer myself when I first started my mill," said Mr. Graham, "but he did not care to accept it."

"That was because he had bought a cottage in Westlake and expected to remain there permanently."

"I dare say he would have little trouble in selling his place if he wanted to make a change."

"That's what I told him. At any rate, mother wishes to come here if I do, and she can't come unless father does."

"Well, Bob, it is possible that I may find it necessary to hire another engineer in place of the man I have. If so, I will make your father an offer."

"Thank you, sir. I will tell him."

After some further conversation they adjourned to the parlor, where Mrs. Graham and Miss Gertie awaited them.

Gertie played on the piano and sang for Bob, and then Bob was induced to sing some himself.

He had a very good voice, and it chimed in well with the girl's.

After a very pleasant evening, Bob retired to the guest chamber and slept like a top until morning, notwithstanding that his head was chock full of brilliant anticipations for the future.

After breakfast he walked around the village with Gertie.

Naturally, he was especially interested in Main Street, particularly in that section where the station was to be built, and where he expected his store was to be.

After lunch he was driven back to the station, and took a train for home.

CHAPTER XI.

FIRST IN THE FIELD.

After supper that evening Bob went around to Joe's house.

"See what I've brought you," he said to his chum, holding up the \$100 check.

Joe grabbed it.

"One hundred dollars, payable to the order of Joseph Craig," he said. "Gee! that looks good."

"Sure it does; but this looks better," replied Bob, showing Mr. Baldwin's \$500 check. "Half of this I'm going to turn over to you after I've got it cashed."

"Why, that will be \$350. I'll be rich."

"Mr. Graham gave me \$500, which plus \$250 makes \$750. That will be enough, I guess, to start me in business," said Bob.

"Then you've made up your mind to go in business for yourself?"

"I have. It's all decided as far as I am concerned. Mr. Graham offered me a position in his bank, but I told him to give it to you, and he's going to do it."

"I haven't spoken to my folks about it yet," said Joe. "I don't know how they will take to the idea of my going to Riverdale."

"Don't say anything to them until you get Mr. Graham's offer, then spring that on them."

"That's what I'll do. I don't see how they can object to me taking a job in a bank. It isn't every fellow gets such a chance."

Bob then told his chum the general particulars in connection with his own business arrangements.

"You're right in it, old man," said Joe. "You have Mr. Graham at your back, and he's the most important man in Riverdale. How do your folks like the idea of you going into business in the village?"

"They raised no great objection when I told them what Mr. Graham promised to do for me. They'll probably move to Riverdale themselves before long."

"I wish my folks would do the same, but there's little chance of that, as my father is anchored here."

"Come, let's go down to Brown's store," said Bob; "I want to have a serious talk with him."

Joe was willing, and so they started for the principal business street of Westgate, and soon reached Charley's stationery and periodical store.

While Bob talked business with the proprietor, Joe looked over the latest illustrated papers.

Brown agreed to let Bob assist him at his store, and in return for his services promised to post him up in the business so that he could take hold of his own place, when he opened it up, with some degree of confidence.

Bob started in next morning, and before the week was out he knew a whole lot about the business.

As a matter of fact, there was not so much to learn in a small country store like Brown's.

He got all his supplies through a wholesale dealer in Chester, the goods being delivered in packages by express at the railroad station, where he received them.

Bob would have one advantage in this respect, for, as he would be located next to the station, the packages con-

signed to him would be practically landed at his door, thus saving him time and trouble.

Bob learned that some periodicals and paper-covered books were returnable if not sold, while others were likely to become dead stock on his hands if not disposed of before the succeeding issue came out to the public.

He found that he would have to keep a standing deposit with the wholesaler to cover his standing orders unless he got some one to guarantee a certain margin of credit for him.

At the end of a month he visited Riverdale to see how things were coming on there.

He found that the railroad station was in the hands of the carpenters, and that Mr. Graham was putting up his building as fast as possible.

Both were expected to be completed about the same time.

The foundations for two of the big factories had been started, while surveys had been made for the others.

Ground was being cleared and leveled for 100 small cottages that were soon to be erected for the working people and their families who before long would be attracted or brought to the village.

Other cottages were being built in different parts of the village within easy reach of the sites of the new factories.

A new and larger schoolhouse had been planned for early erection, and many other improvements were under way in the village.

Altogether, the place was beginning to wear a prosperous look that was encouraging to Bob.

On the following week he and Joe had to go Chester to appear at the trial of Jackson and Billings.

The police had got the rascals' records from Chicago, where they were well known to the city detectives.

Their defence counted for little and conviction was easily secured.

They were sentenced to several years in the State prison.

While in Chester, Bob visited the wholesale agent who supplied Brown, and had a business talk with him.

The dealer was very glad to secure another customer, and encouraged Bob in every way he could.

He handed him out many new wrinkles about the business, and made several suggestions that the boy thought would prove useful to him.

Although he handled a line of cigars and tobacco for the trade, Bob discovered that he could get a better and more popular brand of such goods from a regular tobacco dealer, and decided to patronize that man.

He bought a second-hand soda fountain and two show cases, almost as good as new, and was instructed in the manipulation of the soda water apparatus.

These articles were held subject to his order for their transmission to Riverdale.

Bob's father had accompanied him to Chester in order to get his \$1,200 from the authorities after the trial and conviction of the burglars.

A certain amount of red tape had to be gone through with before Mr. Channing got his money, and then he was once more a happy man and paid off his mortgage.

After the disappearance of Steve Fowler, his family

began to suffer many privations owing to the loss of his income.

Max found it necessary to get a hustle on, and he got a steady job; but he had such a dislike for work that it was a problem how long he would keep busy.

Two weeks later Bob's store was ready for him to take possession of, so he went to Chester to make his final arrangements for opening up.

Joe, who had accepted, with his parents' consent, a clerkship in the Riverdale Bank, which was chartered but not yet ready for business, went to the village to help Bob get his store into shape.

When his stock and fixtures arrived they both worked like beavers displaying things to the best advantage.

While they were thus engaged the post-office was moved in next door.

Bob had given an order to the village painter for a projecting swinging sign, to go over the door, reading on both sides, "Robert Channing, Stationer and Newsdealer. Cigars and Tobacco," and the painter and his assistant were putting it in place when Gertie Graham and Bettie Martin appeared and walked into the new store.

The boys paused long enough to welcome their charmers.

"What do you think of the store as far as we've gone?" asked Bob, regarding the half-filled shelves with a certain degree of pride and satisfaction.

"I think it's going to be the most attractive store in Riverdale," replied Miss Gertie, enthusiastically, and Miss Bettie coincided with her.

"I wish I had an interest in it?" said Joe, wistfully, who, now that the establishment was an actual fact, regarded the enterprise with different eyes than he did when it had been merely in contemplation.

"Well, don't you take an interest in it?" asked Bettie, with dancing eyes.

"Of course I take an interest in it," replied Joe, stoutly; "but I mean I'd like to be Bob's partner."

"Maybe you will be one of these days, old man," spoke up Bob. "When business grows so that I can't handle it myself, and there's enough in it for two, then we'll talk about coming together."

"Well, I hope that time will come soon. As I'm going to be your general assistant after I get through at the bank every day, I'll soon have the business down as fine as yourself."

"Which of you arranged those show cases?" asked Gertie.

"I fixed up this one and Joe spread himself on that. They look all right, don't they?" said Bob.

"Splendid!" exclaimed both the girls in a breath.

Bettie seemed to take the greater interest in Joe's display, while Gertie had eyes only for the case that Bob had arranged.

"You have good taste, Bob," she said, enthusiastically.

She had come to call him Bob by this time, while he called her Gertie.

The same familiarity existed between Joe and Bettie.

"Will you permit us to offer any suggestions?" asked Gertie, with a smile.

"I shall be glad to have you to tell us where we can improve the appearance of the store," replied Bob. "I want to have it look as attractive as possible."

The girls then began to point out various chances that

in their opinion would add to the general effect, and Bob was quick to see how much better their judgment was in matters of display than either his or Joe's.

"I shall expect you to drop in quite often and lend me the aid of your critical eye, Gertie," said Bob, as he made an alteration she had pointed out which made quite a difference in the look of one shelf.

"I sha'n't fail to call when I'm down town," she replied, laughingly. "It will be so nice to stop for a glass of soda when the weather is warm."

"I'm sorry the fountain isn't in commission yet, or I'd treat you to all you could drink."

"You're very good, but I'll take the will for the deed. When are you going to dress your window?"

"As soon as the painter has put my name and business on the glass."

"What are you going to put in it?"

"A general display of what I have in stock so that folks can get an insight into what I have on hand by looking the window over."

At that moment Joe opened up a big package and Bettie, who was standing beside him, uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Gertie," she cried, "do come here and look at these lovely picture post-cards. I never saw such a nice assortment before. Can't I buy a few of them now?" she added to Joe, in an eager tone.

"The store isn't open for business yet, but I guess Bob will be glad to accommodate you," replied Craig.

Gertie walked over and admired the selection of cards greatly.

She wanted some herself, too.

Both girls then asked Bob the prices of the prettiest, and he said five cents each.

"You'll let me make the first purchase, won't you?" said Gertie.

"Sure I will," replied Bob.

"Then give me twenty of those cards, assorted," she said, opening her wallet and tendering the young storekeeper a dollar bill.

"Pick them out yourself, Gertie," he said. "Do you know what I'm going to do with this bill?"

"Put it in your cash drawer, of course," she answered, laughingly.

"Not a bit of it. This is the very first money I've taken in. I mean to frame it, and keep it always as a remembrance."

"Dear me, do storekeepers always do that for luck?" she asked.

"Not to my knowledge, but I'm going to do it just the same. I want you to be my mascot. Will you?"

"Why, of course I will, and I hope I'll bring you good fortune."

"I'm sure you will," he said, with a look that caused her to blush and look down.

Miss Bettie purchased ten of the five-cent cards and ten of the penny cards, and Bob said he'd enroll her on his memory as his second customer.

The girls made some other purchases of things they needed in the stationery line, and both said they'd come back later in the day, when the store would be open for

business, and buy some of the current papers and magazines which the boys hadn't yet got out of their packages.

Before the young ladies took their departure, Bob showed them the two rooms in the rear of the store which had already been fitted up as a bedroom and sitting-room for the accommodation of Joe and himself.

"This is where we're going to live. We've got an oil stove and a supply of dishes and cooking utensils in this closet," and he opened the door and showed the girls. "When we don't care to go out to a restaurant we'll cook our own meals. I'll have to get up my lunch here anyway, as I won't be able to get away in the middle of the day."

"You boys will have a fine time together," said Gertie. "I wish I was a boy."

"I'm glad you're not," replied Bob. "I shouldn't like you half so much if you were."

Gertie blushed and laughed, and then the two girls left.

At three o'clock that afternoon the store was all ready for the public, so Bob opened the door, and to the bottom of the swinging sign that projected from over the door he attached a temporary cloth banner on which were painted the words: "OPEN FOR BUSINESS—Walk In and Look Around."

Out at the edge of the curb Joe placed a wooden sign, painted alike on both sides as follows: "Soda Water—All Flavors. Ginger Ale, Sarsaparilla, Cream Soda. Five Cents a Glass."

"Now I'm ready to do business for myself," said Bob, with supreme satisfaction.

CHAPTER XII.

BOUNCED.

Bob did quite a little business the opening afternoon and evening, and Joe remained with him till noon the next day, when he had to return to Westlake.

Mr. Graham came in, looked his place over with an approving eye, and bought some papers and magazines.

People who came to the post-office for their mail dropped in, and most of them made purchases.

A new thing always attracts attention at first, and this accounted for the rush of trade on the first day.

People hung around and talked with him, as is the custom in a country village, and he took advantage of the fact to advertise his stock in trade, and to let the callers understand that he had about what they wanted, and if he didn't he would get it for them at short notice.

The druggist, who carried a line of stationery, didn't like his advent in the village a little bit, for it threatened to hurt his business in this side line.

But as the pharmacist couldn't very well interfere with the new shop, he was obliged to make the best of the situation.

Bob put a standing advertisement in the new paper which had just started, and he got out a lot of neat circulars which he hired a small boy to distribute at the doors of all the people in the place.

He also mailed these to the farmers round about, and the effect was soon apparent in increased and steady trade that came flocking to his store.

Mr. Graham, his daughter, and Bettie Martin solicited

custom for him among their friends, and they knew everybody in Riverdale worth mentioning.

Bob distributed a batch of his circulars in Graham's Mill, and called especial attention among the men to his tobacco stock.

In the meantime the railroad station was completed, and a morning and evening train, consisting of a locomotive, a baggage car, and one coach, was inaugurated between Riverdale and Centerville on the main line.

Work was pushed on the new factories and on the other buildings, and Bob watched their progress toward completion with great interest.

About this time the bank opened up, the building having been completed within a short distance of Bob's store, and then Joe came to stay with him permanently.

Fourth of July was now at hand, and Bob got in a good stock of firecrackers and other articles of a like nature so dear to the average boy's heart, and soon had all the village boys traveling in the direction of his store.

Mr. Graham gave him a commission to purchase a considerable quantity of fireworks which he wanted to let off at his grounds, and he got similar, though less liberal, orders from other important residents of the village.

The result was that Riverdale promised to do itself proud in the way of fiery display in honor of Independence Day.

Soon after the Glorious Fourth passed into oblivion Mr. Graham decided that he must have a new engineer, so he made another offer to Mr. Channing, which was accepted this time, and he and his wife moved to one of the new cottages that had been erected in the village.

He found little trouble in disposing of his interest in his Westlake property for an advance on what he gave for it, and this money, with his savings, enabled him to buy outright the Riverdale cottage.

One afternoon, when Joe walked into the store after he was through for the day at the bank, he said:

"Who do you suppose have come to the village to live?"

"I don't know," replied Bob. "Who?"

"The Fowlers."

"Is that so?" said Bob, in surprise.

"Yes. I met little Nannie Fowler, the girl you saved from being burnt to death, outside the bank a few minutes ago. She said that her mother has come to work for Mr. Graham at his house, and that he's given them rooms over the carriage house."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that they'll be able to get along now, for they couldn't put much dependence in Max as a provider."

"I should say they couldn't."

"What about him? Has he come to live here, too? I shouldn't imagine that Mr. Graham would want him around."

"Nannie told me that Mr. Graham got him apprenticed to Mr. Jones, the carpenter, but he hasn't started in yet."

"I never saw any one that had such a grouch against work as he. He'll grow up to be a lazy bum if he doesn't look out."

"Jones will make him get a move on, if anybody can," laughed Joe.

"Say, Joe," said Bob, "do you mind delivering that

bundle of tobacco up at the mill?" asked Bob. "The list is on the outside."

"Sure I'll deliver it," said Joe.

"You can go around and get any additional orders the men want to send. There are two late magazines in the bundle also—one for Foreman Jinks and the other goes to Mr. Richards, the head bookkeeper."

"All right," said Joe, grabbing the bundle and starting off with it on his bicycle, which he got from the rear of the store.

He hadn't been gone ten minutes before Gertie Graham and her chum Bettie came in.

"Good afternoon, Gertie and Miss Bettie," said Bob, coming from behind the counter.

"Good afternoon, Bob," said both young ladies.

"Lovely day for a stroll up Main Street," grinned Bob.

"Charming, but rather warm," replied Gertie. "I owe Bettie a treat, and so we have come in here to get a cream soda each."

"It will give me a great deal of pleasure to wait on you," said Bob, going over to the little soda water counter. "I keep a good supply of ice on hand, so I can promise you a nice cool drink."

He prepared them two glasses of the beverage.

They stood and talked a while and then Bettie said her aunt wanted another box of initialed stationery like the last she had got from him.

"I guess I've got another box with the letter H," said Bob, starting for the counter, Gertie's aunt's name being Hogan, wife of the justice.

At that moment a newcomer entered the store.

It was Max Fowler.

Bob wasn't at all pleased to see him, but that fact didn't bother Max.

"So this is your old store, is it?" grinned Max, in a disagreeable way. "Gone into business for yourself, eh? Don't you want a clerk?"

"No, I don't want a clerk, Max Fowler; and if I did, I shouldn't hire you."

"Why wouldn't you?" snarled the son of Steve.

"Because I wouldn't."

"You're puttin' on a lot of airs, ain't you, 'cause you are your own boss. Well, you ain't so much."

"I don't want to talk to you, Max Fowler. You didn't come in here to buy anything, so you might as well get out."

"How do you know I didn't come to buy somethin'? Here, give me a couple of cigarettes for a penny, and look sharp about it."

"I don't sell cigarettes to boys," replied Bob, coldly.

"Oh, you don't," sneered Max. "What are you yourself but a boy, and a pretty stuck-up one at that? Are you goin' to wait on me or ain't you?"

"I'm not anxious to sell you anything."

"Think you kin insult me before your customers. I've a good mind to punch your head for you," said Max, aggressively.

"You'd better leave the store. I won't permit such language here."

"I'll leave when I get ready, and I'll talk as I want to. This is a free country, and you don't run this village by a long shot."

"Look here, Max Fowler, I don't want any trouble with you," said Bob, suddenly turning on his unwelcome visitor with a resolute air that meant business, "but if you don't go peacefully, I'll have to put you out."

"Put me out, will you?" cried Max, defiantly. "I don't think you will. If you give me any of your sass, I'll clean you and your old store out together."

He began to roll up his sleeves, and the girls looked frightened.

"Are you going to get out?" asked the young store-keeper, determinedly.

"No, I'm not, till I've licked you, see?"

Bob suddenly grabbed Max Fowler by the neck and back and exclaimed: "Now, then, twenty-three for you! March—one, two, three!"

The third step landed Fowler on the threshold of the shop, and a push completed his ignominious exit.

He slid out on to the sidewalk and, to the great amusement of several village boys who had been looking in at the window, he came down on the hard flagging with a thump that rattled his teeth and shook him up to a considerable extent.

He got up, shook his fist back at Bob, and without making any effort to return, slouched off down the street as mad as a hornet, and swearing vengeance against the boy who had only handed him what he deserved.

"That's the way I treat chaps of his stamp," said Bob, walking behind the counter and reaching for the boxes of initialed stationery.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE HANDS OF HIS ENEMY.

"Here is a letter H₁ box," said Bob, opening it and showing Bettie that the paper and envelopes were just what she wanted.

"Now come over to the fountain and let me treat you to a soda," said Bob.

"Oh, dear, you mustn't be giving away your profits in that way," said Gertie.

"Never mind the profits, Gertie. The pleasure of you young ladies' company is worth more than the soda."

"You say that real nice, Bob," laughed Gertie. "After that, I suppose we'll have to accept the treat."

They adjourned to the soda fountain just as Joe came back.

"Step up, Joe, and have a drink," said Bob.

"I don't care if I do," replied Craig, greeting the girls in his usual cheery style, and smiling his sweetest at Bettie, who reciprocated.

Two ladies came in for a soda at that moment and Joe and the girls moved away to let Bob wait on them.

"You keep fine soda, young man," said one of the ladies, after drinking hers.

"Thank you, ma'am; I try to keep the best."

"I like it ever so much better than what I've been accustomed to get at the drugstore. I shall certainly come here in the future."

"Would you like to look over the magazines, ladies? You will find them yonder. You are not obliged to buy unless you find something that attracts you. I have several of the latest novels in paper cover, price ten cents, that

came in this morning. You are welcome to examine them. I will show them to you."

Bob also called their attention to his stationery and other things that he thought might interest them, with the result that the ladies, who had only come in to get the soda, made several purchases, and departed quite charmed by his politeness and obliging manner.

He had done even better, for in a small place like Riverdale these ladies were bound to advertise him and his store among their friends, though by this time about everybody in the village knew that there was a first-class stationery and news shop next to the post-office at the station.

Soon after the ladies left, Gertie and Bettie went away, and then other customers dropped in and were waited on by Joe while Bob took his wheel and went on a spin up the road to take a look at the new factories that were almost ready by this time to begin business.

During the next few weeks Riverdale made a considerable addition to its population, for the factories one by one opened up for business.

One morning, when Bob opened up his store at seven o'clock, he was surprised to see a sheet of paper plastered against the door.

It contained the following words, rudely scrawled, half printed, half written:

"Bob Channing BEWAIRE! You're goin to git HURT, and WORSE before tomorrer night. You're NO GOOD. You've got A BUM SHOP and will have to GO. We don't want you in this place no more, SEE! So SKE-DADDLE or TAKE THE CONSEQUENCES.

"The vigilance committee."

Bob read the strange "warning" and then carried it in to show it to Joe.

"What do you think of that? I found it stuck on the door outside."

Joe read and grinned.

"There's only one chap in the village who would be guilty of such a piece of tomfoolery, and that's Max Fowler," said Bob.

"That's right," nodded Joe. "It's just like him."

"He's down on me like a carload of bricks since I bounced him from the store."

"S'pose he is. He wouldn't dare try to injure you."

"It's impossible to say what he might not try to do if he worked himself up to it," replied Joe, thoughtfully.

"Do you really think he means mischief?" asked Joe.

"It's hard to tell, but it would be well for us to keep our weather eyes lifting in case he should be plotting some rascality."

That evening Joe went to call on Bettie Martin, and he remained at her house until quarter-past ten.

Bob closed up the store at half-past eight and went for a ride on his wheel.

He stopped at Mr. Graham's and spent an hour or more with Gertie.

On his way back his wheel struck an invisible obstruction, which happened to be a stout cord stretched across the road, and he took a header then landed him half-stunned a couple of yards ahead.

When he came to he found himself surrounded by four

boys with black cloths, pierced with eye holes, over their faces.

He also discovered that his hands were bound.

"What the dickens does this mean?" he demanded, angrily.

"It means that you are in the hands of the vigilance committee," said one of his captors.

Those words recalled to Bob the warning he had found on the door of his store that morning.

He immediately recognized the speaker as Max Fowler.

"I know you, Fowler," he said, in an aggressive tone. "You'd better release me at once or there'll be something doing you won't like."

"Huh!" sneered the spokesman of the party. "You can't swear I'm Fowler. I'm the leader of the vigilance committee, that's who I am. We're goin' to run you out of the village 'cause you hain't wanted here. The warnin' you got said you'd git hurt and worse. You're goin' to be treated to a noo soot and rid on a rail, see? If you come back, more'll happen to you. The vigilance committee hain't to be fooled with."

"Don't imagine you can hoodwink me, Fowler," replied Bob, in a determined tone. "I know it's you. If you try on any funny business with me, I'll make things so hot for you that you'll wish you'd behaved yourself."

"Talk is cheap, Bob Channin'," retorted the masked boy. "You'll feel diff'rent pretty soon or I'm a liar. Take hold of him, fellers, and carry him into the woods."

The four grabbed Bob by the legs and arms, lifted him, and then the procession moved away toward the near-by woods, into which they soon disappeared.

Half an hour later Joe returned to the store and, finding Bob away, guessed that he had gone up the road to call on Gertie.

Half an hour and his chum did not show up.

"It's eleven o'clock. I wonder where the dickens he can be keeping himself. I think I'll take a spin up the road. Maybe I'll meet him."

Joe got his wheel and started in the direction of the Graham home.

As he reached the suburbs he almost ran into an object sprawled out in the middle of the highway.

Dismounting, he looked at it closely.

"Why, it's a bicycle. What is it doing here? And who does it belong to? Can it be Bob's, and he has met with an accident?"

He recognized it at once as his chum's.

Thinking Bob had had a tumble and was lying unconscious somewhere near, Joe looked carefully around, but could see no sign of him.

He found a memorandum book, however, that he knew to be his friend's.

"Something has happened to him, that's clear," muttered Joe. "But what? Where is he?"

Suddenly that warning paper of the morning occurred to his mind.

"My gracious! Can it be that he was taken off his guard and attacked by that young rascal, Max Fowler? If so, Fowler must have had assistance. And they've carried Bob off somewhere. Now, in what direction would they be likely to have taken him? Probably the woods yonder.

Well, it's me for the woods at once, on the chance of running across them."

He stood both wheels up against the fence and then climbed it.

As he straddled the top rail a bright light suddenly sprang up in the woods.

Momentarily it grew brighter, as if a big fire had been started there.

Joe could see the flames mounting above the tops of the trees, mingled with a volume of thick, black smoke.

"There's something unusual doing yonder," he breathed, springing into the open space beyond the road and running rapidly toward the wood.

CHAPTER XIV.

A THRILLING RESCUE.

The four masked boys carried their prisoner through the woods to an open space where an old one-story and attic house, long since abandoned, stood.

They marched straight into the open doorway of the building and deposited their burden on the floor.

Then the boy Bob suspected to be Max Fowler struck a match and lighted a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle he picked up from one corner.

Bob, looking straight before him, saw a wide, old-fashioned fireplace.

An iron crane swung out from one side of the brick wall of the fireplace.

On this hung a big, ancient-looking iron pot.

Underneath the pot was a pile of brush and wood ready for starting a blaze.

In a far corner Bob saw a rude ladder that led up to a hole in the ceiling and furnished communication with the attic above.

"Fellers," said the spokesman of the party, "there hain't no use wastin' time holdin' a trial over the prisoner. He's guilty, and that's all there is to it."

"If you say he's guilty, he is," said one of the masked boys. "You're bossin' the job."

"That's the way to talk. The vigilance committee havin' found him guilty, and decided that a coat of tar and feathers is the proper kind of punishment for him, we will now proceed to carry the sentence into effect. Afterwards we'll ride him on a rail to the other end of the woods, and leave him with the warnin' to skedaddle. Barney, light the fire and start the tar to b'ilin'. While it's heatin' we'll have a smoke! The prisoner kin say his prayers, or do the next thing."

The masked boy alluded to as Barney started the fire under the pot, while the spokesman went to a closet and yanked out a pillowcase full of feathers.

The others squatted on the floor in front of the pot, produced cigarettes and started to smoke.

"How is the tar?" asked the leader by and by. "Is it bubblin' yet?"

Barney looked into the pot and then shook his head.

"While you're doin' nothin' you'd better get the brush out of the closet," said the presiding spirit of the vigilance committee.

Barney produced the brush and laid it on the floor.

"When things is ready," said the head boy, "I'll do the tarrin', see? You fellers kin get busy with the feathers."

"Are you goin' to take his clothes off?" asked one of the boys.

"Some of 'em. It won't do to put it ag'in his skin, for it might kill him, and that hain't the purpose of this here vigilance committee."

"I should say not," spoke up one of the boys. "A lark is a lark, but it mustn't be carried too far, or I'm out of it."

"Don't worry, Jim. I know how far to go and be on the safe side."

Twenty minutes elapsed.

"How's the tar now, Barney?" asked the leader at the end of that interval.

Barney stirred the liquid mass and announced that it was in good shape.

"Then take it off the fire and let it stand on the stones to cool a bit."

During all this time Bob had watched the proceedings without saying a word.

He had made a furtive but persistent effort to free his hands, but the cords held him firmly.

At length the leader of the party went to the pot, stirred the tar and lifted the stick up to see how it ran.

Apparently satisfied that it was of the right consistency, he said:

"Barney, you and Jim strip the prisoner of his trousers and jacket and then we'll proceed to make a guy of him."

The two boys seized Bob and lifted him to his feet.

Bob, however, didn't propose to tamely submit to the proposed indignity without a strong effort in his own behalf.

To remove his jacket they would have to loosen his hands, and Barney called attention to that fact.

"Pull his jacket down and let it hang over his hands. That'll do," replied the leader.

When Barney started to do this, Bob wrenched himself away from Jim's grasp, made a dart forward and kicked the kettle over.

The tar ran over into the fire and blazed up at once.

The vigilance committee were staggered by this unexpected happening, and at the same time unnerved by the spreading fire, which soon caught on to the woodwork of the shanty and began to climb the wall toward the ceiling.

The old building was dry and highly inflammable, and the flames made such rapid headway that the four young rascals became panic-stricken and fled for the outer air as fast as they could go.

Bob followed them out and took refuge among the trees.

In a few minutes the fire had penetrated the attic and the dull glow of the blaze could be seen through the one upper window, from which the thick smoke came rolling forth.

At that moment, as Bob looked at the doomed building, an awful cry broke the silence of the night air, and the figure of a man in a shirt and trousers appeared in the smoke-lit window and fell limply across the sill, as if he had been overpowered by the heat and smoke.

Bob ran out into the opening, bound and helpless as he

was, and shouted loudly in an effort to arouse the imperiled man.

The poor fellow, however, seemed to be utterly oblivious to his danger.

Bob tugged frantically at the bonds, but the exertion he made only served to tighten the strands around his wrists and make them cut into his flesh.

At that moment he spied the boy called Barney, who had torn the mask from his face, and was gazing at the man in the window in a helpless, fascinated way.

Bob dashed up to him.

"Here, you," he cried, excitedly, "cut me loose, for heaven's sake, and let me do something to save him."

"I haven't any knife," palpitated the young rascal.

"Put your hand in my pocket and take out mine. Quick!"

Barney obeyed, but it seemed an endless time before the boy had managed to cut him free.

By that time the flames had caught on the roof and burst through, while the whole interior of the loft, as well as the ground floor, was now a blazing mass, so rapidly had the fire seized upon the flimsy structure.

The thick, suffocating black smoke made by the tar rolled heavenward with the tongues of flame, and poured out of the door below and the window where the victim lay across the sill like a log.

Throwing aside his jacket, Bob ran up to the building and looked for some means of reaching the low window from the outside.

There was none, so far as he could make out.

The man seemed to be doomed.

It was then that Bob spied a long, stout piece of timber half buried in the grass and earth near by.

Turning around and seeing Barney still watching the burning building and the man, whose clothes were already smoking from the heat, he yelled to him:

"Come here and help me get this piece of wood."

Bob's frantic energy infused some activity into the boy, and between them they succeeded in dislodging the piece of timber.

As soon as the piece of timber was in place the boy drew off, while Bob shinned up the inclined surface like a monkey, regardless of the fierce heat that assailed him.

The man's clothes were now on fire, and his fate rested in the balance.

Bob reached out and grabbed his arms, which hung limply out of the window, with his head bent down between them.

He pulled hard, but the victim was too firmly anchored on the other side.

There was nothing for Bob to do but climb higher.

He did so, until he reached the window.

Then, clinging with his knees to the timber, and facing the raging blaze before him that seemed to shrivel up his skin and burn his very eyeballs, he seized the man and drew him over the sill.

It was impossible for him to hold the man's weight as it came upon his arms, and both tumbled to the grass together with a force that rendered Bob more than half dazed.

At that moment the flames burst through the entire

rescuer and rescued lay in a position of grave peril, and what would have been the ultimate result we cannot say but that Mr. Graham and his coachman appeared upon the scene at the moment Bob made his final effort at the window to save the apparently doomed man.

They stood for a moment aghast at the sight before their eyes.

Both recognized that the attempted rescue was a daring and almost foolhardy one.

Then as Bob, whom neither recognized at the moment, and the man tumbled to the grass, they rushed forward, seized the two, and dragged them out of the danger zone.

"Why, it's Bob Channing!" gasped the mill owner, as he looked down at the boy.

Bob made an effort to rise, partly succeeded, then with a moan fell back and rolled over unconscious.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

At that moment Joe Crisp appeared and joined the mill owner and his employee.

Mr. Graham hurriedly explained what had happened, so far as he and his man had seen the incident.

"What that man is Steve Fowler, the fireman of the Westlake Mills, who robbed Bob's father of \$1,200," said Joe, in considerable astonishment. "What is he doing around here?"

Mr. Graham was surprised at this piece of news, but the urgent need of medical attendance for the two unfortunates was too pressing to permit him to waste any time asking Joe questions about Steve.

"We must get them both over to my house at once, and have a doctor attend them. Bob took the most desperate chances to save this man and there is no telling how badly he may be hurt."

Barney had skipped out of sight with the advent of the mill owner and his coachman, and so it remained for the three to carry the victims of the conflagration to the Graham home.

A physician was summoned by telephone and, while waiting for his arrival, efforts were made to revive Bob.

Mrs. Graham and Gertie, who had retired and were asleep, got up and dressed as soon as they learned that Bob Channing had been brought to the house in a seemingly dangerous state.

Gertie was particularly disturbed and excited, and cried while her mother and father were working over Bob.

At length he was brought to his senses, but his face and hands were in a terrible state.

He seemed much to the relief of all present, that he was not badly hurt.

The doctor, as soon as he arrived and had examined him, declared that his injuries were not at all serious.

Steve Fowler's condition, on the contrary, was very serious, and the physician could not say with any degree of certainty at this stage whether he would recover or not.

His wife was aroused, and Steve was conveyed to her rooms in the second floor of the carriage house and put

to bed, the doctor leaving medicine and directions for his care, and promising to call in the morning.

Bob was assisted to bed in the guest chamber, and Joe agreed to stay with him during the night to see that he wanted for nothing.

The store remained closed for two days, at the end of which time Bob reappeared behind his counter, looking rather the worse for his late experience.

Steve by that time was declared to be out of danger, but was unable to leave his bed yet a while.

When he learned Bob had saved his life, he appeared to be grateful.

Bob had told his night's adventure to Mr. Graham and Joe.

The mill owner notified the head constable to hunt for and arrest the boys implicated in the outrage, especially Max Fowler.

Barney was caught and gave his pals away, so that the other two were soon in the lock-up, where they were kept a month on prison diet and then discharged.

Max, however, had taken time by the forelock and skipped out of the neighborhood.

It was years before he was heard from again, after he had served several years in the reformatory of an adjacent State for theft.

When the particulars of Bob's heroic conduct were circulated throughout the village, he became a very popular local personage, and his store received a big boom.

Gertie was very proud to be seen in his company after this, and made no secret of her partiality for him.

A fourth factory was opened up in Riverdale about this time, and it was reported that other interests were coming to locate in the village which soon expected to be rated as a small town.

Bob having secured a monopoly in his line of business, there was little danger that a business rival would deem it a profitable venture to try and cut into his trade.

So the weeks passed away, fall merged into winter, and a new and even more prosperous year opened for Riverdale.

One afternoon Gertie called at the store to see if Bob would go skating with her and Bettie.

She knew that Joe would look after the place while the young storekeeper was away.

Bob agreed to go with her and the three started for a big pond not far from the Graham Mill.

As they passed the mill a man came out of the engine-house, trundling an iron barrow.

Bob saw him and remarked:

"I never thought to see Steve Fowler working with my father again. He seems, however, to have turned over a new leaf, and I hope he will stick to it."

"It is better to forgive and forget than to nurse hard feelings," replied the girl, softly. "Your father has been generous toward him, and I think he appreciates the fact, and is sorry for what he did in Westlake that day. At least, Mrs. Fowler told mother so. As for yourself, Bob, they both have strong reasons to be grateful to you, for, besides saving his life that night in the wood, you helped save the lives of their three little girls. You are the bravest and best boy in the world," she concluded, enthusiastically.

"I am glad you think so, Gertie," he responded, in a low tone, "for I value your good opinion more than anything else in the world."

His words thrilled her, but the presence of Bettie prevented the two from indulging in any moonshine at that moment.

They were presently at the pond, where a score or more of the village lads and lassies were spinning over its glassy surface.

Bob assisted the girls to put on their skates, and then adjusted his own.

For an hour they enjoyed themselves as only healthy and happy young people can.

"One more spin around and then we'll go home," said Bob. "I'll give you girls ten yards start and then I'll try to catch one of you."

Gertie and Bettie agreed to this, and then, fully determined that he should not catch them, for they were both splendid skaters, they started for the opposite side of the pond.

Bob started after them at what he considered the proper moment, and away flew the three skaters, as fleet as birds on the wing.

The boy, however, could not overcome the handicap he had given them, and as they started to round the other end of the big pond they had, if anything, gained a yard or more on him.

Gertie looked over her shoulder and flung a little defiant laugh at him, then something happened.

The strap of one of her skates parted and she diverged from her course, slipped down, and glided straight into an air-hole in the ice.

A cry of terror burst from her lips when she perceived her peril, but it was impossible for her to avoid it.

Crack!—Splash!

She fell into the opening and disappeared.

Bob, with a gasp of alarm, flew to her rescue.

The ice was thin where she had gone in, and that made the girl's rescue hazardous.

But Bob didn't care for that.

He intended to save her if he lost his own life in the attempt.

As her head appeared above the chill water he was crawling over the cracked surface, looking for her to rise.

The moment he saw her face appear he jumped in and seized her, supporting her with one arm while he struck out with the other.

The ice crumbled away as he advanced, and it looked as if he would be chilled to death before he could save her.

Help, however, came at that moment.

Two level-headed boys ran up and pushed the end of a log to Bob.

"Lay hold of it, Gertie, and I'll have you out in no time."

She obeyed with chattering teeth.

Relieved of her weight, he managed to scramble on to the more solid part of the ice, and then reaching out and grasping her hand he hauled her out of the hole to safety.

"Now, skate for the other side with all your might, Gertie," he said, catching her by the hand and leading off.

Arrived at the end of the pond, he tore off her skates, and got rid of his own in a twinkling, by which time Bettie had hers off.

"Now we must run all the way to your house to keep up our circulation," he said to Gertie, and off they started, the two girls laughing heartily at the figure they cut.

It was a three-quarter-of-a-mile run, and the two girls were breathless when they arrived.

Bob rushed Gertie into the house and handed her over to her mother, and then started for the store post haste, leaving the girls to make all the explanations.

Gertie declared to her mother that Bob had saved her life, and Mr. and Mrs. Graham overwhelmed him with their gratitude when he called that evening to see how their daughter was.

Gertie herself thanked Bob feelingly for his courage and presence of mind.

"That's all right, Gertie," he said, putting his arm around her waist. "You know I couldn't afford to lose you. You know I think you are the dearest, sweetest girl in all the world. You've been my mascot since I opened my store, and I feel that you've brought me luck. Will you be my mascot always, dear? Will you promise to be my wife some day?"

"Yes," fluttered the girl, hiding her face on his shoulder.

And she kept her word, as a marriage notice in the Riverdale "Argus" two years later testified to.

When that interesting event happened, Riverdale had become a fair-sized town, and Bob the most prosperous of all the storekeepers in the place.

Joe didn't go into partnership with him because he preferred to work for the cashiership of the bank, which he eventually succeeded to and then married the girl of his heart—Bettie Martin.

Bob now employs three assistants, two of them girls, and has recently built a handsome cottage near the mansion of his father-in-law.

His success was almost wholly due to those qualities which we mentioned in the opening chapter as being inherent in him; but the fact must not be overlooked that he was FIRST IN THE FIELD.

THE END.

READ A BROKER AT EIGHTEEN; OR, ROY GILBERT'S WALL STREET CAREER," which will be the next number (98) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

In 1864, at City Point, Va., while the general of the army was strolling along the wharf one day he saw a big raw-boned teamster belaboring one of his wheel mules with a billet of wood and cursing him roundly. Grant quietly said, "My man, stop beating that mule." Rawny looked round at the little, unostentatious-looking person in a plain blouse, "Say, be you driving these here mules, or be I?" and crack again went the cudgel. "Well," said the general, "I think I have sufficient authority here to stop your cruelty to that animal;" and, turning to the officer in charge of the train, he ordered him to have the teamster "tied up" for twenty-four hours when he returned to camp, and report the fact to headquarters when done. The news spread rapidly from camp to camp, and there was much less mule-mauling after that.

Try the following simple experiment if you desire to obtain a vivid idea of the force of atmospheric pressure: Place an ordinary wooden ruler on a table in such a manner that half of it will project beyond the table, then over the table and the portion of the ruler thereon, lay a smooth sheet of paper. Now, if you strike the exposed part of the ruler, it will, in nine cases out of ten, break in half, and yet the sheet of paper on the table will neither be raised nor moved in the slightest from its position. The reason is that the atmospheric pressure on the paper is more than sufficient to counterbalance the force of the blow which is struck at the ruler. By means of simple experiments like this, one can learn a great deal of science.

"Can I get a dollar on this?" asked a well-dressed man, as he tendered a handsome, fur-lined overcoat to the pawnbroker.

"Well, I should say so," replied the money-lender, visibly surprised, "and a lot more if you want it."

"No, one dollar's enough," was the man's answer, as he took the ticket, after the usual preliminaries had been gone through with.

Later in the day, the owner of the coat came back, paid the pawnbroker the dollar with the legal charge of three cents, and took his property back.

"Say," said the man of loans, handing over the coat regretfully, "you're a queer customer. Don't you know you might have left the garment here for a month and it would only have cost you three cents, just what you've paid for the use of the dollar for one day?"

"Oh, I didn't need the dollar," answered the customer, and in proof of this assertion, he pulled out a roll of bills "large enough to choke a cow," as a sporting man would say.

"That beats me," said the pawnbroker, now thoroughly interested. "What did you pawn it for, then?"

"Simply for safekeeping," coolly replied the customer. "You see, it's like this: It's a warm day, and I didn't want to lug

the coat around with me. I am not stopping at a hotel, because I am only in town between trains. At the depot parcel room, the boy in charge wanted ten cents for checking it, so I concluded to make seven cents by letting you take care of it for me."

It has long been the custom of tourists to toss silver pieces into the harbor waters at Honolulu for the enjoyment of watching the half naked Hawaiian boys dive for them. Not a tithe of the coins are ever caught by the deft little water dogs, and after many a year they formed a part of the newly made lands near the railway wharf.

The harbor has yielded up much of the money that has been sent to the bottom in this manner, through the medium of the big suction dredger which is now at work. The mud and silt on the harbor bottom is sucked up through pipes into the dredger, and is again forced through a long chain of pipes to the tidewater lands near the railway wharves, where it is spread out over a large area. Natives discovered some time ago that this pipe is depositing more than ordinary silt. Coins of all metals except gold have poured out of the pipe line, and many Hawaiians have profited by their vigil there.

The captain of the dredger says that for some time past his men have known of the treasure thus being brought up from the harbor, and efforts were made to stop the silver flow from the dredger before it had a chance to get into the out-flow pipe. A box was constructed, and into this the majority of the coins sucked up have dropped and are easily got out. It is seldom that an opening of the box has not yielded up a handful of nickels, dollars and dimes of several nations.

JOKES AND JESTS.

"You are very pretty," he said to the heiress. She was a wise girl and realized her own plainness. "I fancy," she replied, "that my prettiness was inherited along with my grandfather's money."

Dr. Parkhurst told the other day a good story about a bishop. "The bishop," he said, "likes a good cigar, and was travelling to Albany in the smoking car. A laboring man took the seat beside him, eyed his clerical garb, got a light from him and said, as he settled back for a comfortable smoke: 'Parson, sir?' The bishop hesitated. Then he answered blandly: 'I was once.' 'Ah,' said the laboring man, 'drink, I suppose.'"

At a recent club dinner one of the guests, in the course of his speech, spoke of the value of repartee. He told of a handsome, well-dressed woman who got in a crowded street car. She had the attention of every one and soon had a seat. Turning to the donor, she said, "You're a jewel." "No," he replied, "I am a jeweller—I set the jewel."

Norman Hapgood, journalist and essayist, was discussing veracity. "Truth telling," he said, "is not always wise or praiseworthy. Indeed, it is sometimes the reverse. Thus a young man called on a young woman early one spring morning. He had his automobile along. He wanted to give the young woman a morning spin through the country. A little girl, the young woman's niece, answered the bell. 'Is your auntie in?' said the young man. 'Yes, sir,' said the little girl. 'That's good. Where is she?' he went on. 'She's upstairs,' said the little girl, 'in her nightie, looking over the railing.'"

While waiting for the speaker at a public meeting a pale little man in the audience seemed very nervous. He glanced over his shoulder from time to time, and squirmed and shifted about in his seat. At last, unable to stand it any longer, he arose and demanded, in a high, penetrating voice: "Is there a Christian Scientist in this room?" A woman at the other side of the hall got up and said: "I am a Christian Scientist." "Well, then, m'l'am," requested the little man, "would you mind changing seats with me? I'm sitting in a draught."

A BARREL OF TREASURE

OR,

A GALLANT YOUNG SAILOR BOY

By Paul Braddon.

The ship *Jumping-Jenny* was a craft of 1,500 tons burden, laden with a mixed cargo, in command of Captain Ralph Ripley, with a crew of fifteen men, one passenger, and was bound from New York to Melbourne.

Dick Fairday was the captain's cabin boy—a stalwart lad of eighteen, with a handsome face—the penniless orphan of a sea captain, who had been in the service of the company which owned the *Jumping-Jenny*.

One dark, gloomy night, as the boy stood leaning his elbows upon the weather bulwarks gazing thoughtfully out over the dismal waters, the passenger referred to strode up to the boy and tapped him on the back.

He was a tall, thin man, wearing spectacles and side whiskers, and was known as Dr. Hiram Pike, who had served many years as a ship's surgeon, but now was on his way to Australia to take a position as head of a medical institute.

"Dick," he said, in his quiet, grave way, "you seem to be abstracted, if not melancholy. I hope you feel well, my boy?"

Young Fairday gave a violent start, wheeled around, and glancing up at the kindly face of the questioner, he answered presently:

"Oh, I'm all right. Just was thinking."

"Upon a momentous subject, apparently?"

"You can bet it was. It's about a barrel of gold."

"Surprising! I hope you are not building air-castles?"

"Not a bit of it. Reckoning on a certainty, doctor."

"Do you mind gratifying my curiosity about the matter?"

"Certainly I will. My father was wrecked among the Pacific islands, about ten years ago. His ship, the *Sea Robin*, went to pieces on an island in the Society group which we're now passing, but which one it was, I really don't know."

"The *Sea Robin*—ten years ago?" queried Dr. Pike, with a look of great agitation upon his face. "Good Heaven! What is your name?"

"Fairday," replied the boy, in some surprise. "But why are you so excited all of a sudden, doctor?"

"Why," gasped the physician, "I was your father's ship surgeon on the *Sea Robin* when she was lost! At the time of the wreck, your father and I were the only ones who escaped alive. In fact, I was swept ashore senseless, and remained so for a space of several hours. When revived I found Captain Fairday with me."

"Then you know that my father saved a barrel of virgin gold, which he purchased of an Australian native for a mere trifle? He told my mother, ere he died, that he brought it ashore from the wreck and buried it on the island. He left it there when a passing ship picked him up. He feared being robbed, and intended to return and get it later on. But he died at home before he could carry out this plan. He failed to tell my mother which island he was on. But we knew he had a companion."

"And that companion was me," said Dr. Pike, emphatically.

"Then you know upon which island this gold lies buried?" the boy cried, delightedly. "I never expected to find this out. It seems as if Providence brought us together this way. I beseech you to tell me where that island is. I had it explained to me where I can put my hands upon the treasure, if I could only locate the island."

"Hold on, my boy," interposed the doctor, gravely, as he shook his head and held up his hand. "I am dreadfully sorry to dash your hopes, but the fact is, we did not have our bearings, and I consequently haven't the remotest idea which one of the islands it was, excepting by the appearance, which I might be able to identify if I should ever again happen to be near it."

Dick uttered a cry of bitter disappointment.

He had been feverishly expecting to clear up the mystery, and enrich himself by ultimately securing the gold; but now his bright hopes were rudely crushed, and he felt that his last expectations of ever being anything but a miserable poor sailor were gone forever.

As the boy turned away he was startled to see Captain Ripley standing near by, intently listening to all that was said.

He was a short, burly man, with a sandy beard and a red face, a fiery temper, and an ugly disposition.

To all appearances he was as much disappointed as the boy upon learning Dr. Pike disclaiming a knowledge of which one of the islands the gold was buried on, and ripping out an oath, he cried:

"I wouldn't be surprised if yer alyin' about that, so's ye kin go thar some day an' git ther gold fer yerself, Dr. Pike."

"Sir! You insult me!" cried the doctor, indignantly.

"Oh, I don't keer a blame how yer takes it," sneeringly said Ripley, and then he added, with a dark scowl, his tones low and hissing: "An' by ther arch fiend, man, if yer do know whar it is, I'll have it outen yer afore this 'ere v'yage is over, an' don't yer fergit it!"

"It is very evident," said the doctor, with dignity, "that you forget that you are threatening a passenger, and not one of your crew. It is, moreover, very apparent that you are anxious to learn where the treasure lies buried, in order to get it yourself."

"You lie!" exclaimed Ripley, but he gave a guilty start.

"Captain—stop! Don't degrade yourself by becoming loaf-erish!"

"What! D'ye dare, ter call me names?" yelled Ripley, his ugly temper bristling up, and his tyrannical, overbearing nature asserting itself, and he picked up a capstan bar, and swinging it around, he dealt the physician a stunning blow that knocked him down.

Dr. Pike uttered a cry of pain, and tried to get up, but the furious captain sprang at him like a tiger, and was just about to deal him a second blow, when Dick interfered.

The boy's eyes flashed fire when he witnessed the captain's brutality, and unable to restrain himself, he doubled up his fists, sprang between Pike and Ripley, and dealt the captain such a terrific blow in the face that he was knocked sprawling.

"You coward!" the boy cried, in clear, ringing tones. "To strike a defenceless man that way, for telling the truth!"

"Thunder an' lightning!" yelled the infuriated officer, scrambling to his feet, with one of his eyes blackened. "This is mutiny, you dog. I'll kill yer fere that walt, cuss yer! I'll tear yer ter pieces!"

He made a rush for the gallant cabin boy, but Dick picked up the capstan bar and pluckily faced the brute.

All the watch on deck had seen what transpired, and were then surrounding the trio, all their sympathies with the boy.

The captain glashed his teeth with impotent fury and paused.

"Seize that lubber!" he yelled to his men. "Put him in irons!"

"No, sir!" defiantly cried several of the crew.

They surrounded the plucky boy, to defend rather than hurt him.

A volley of maledictions pealed from the captain's lips upon seeing this, and pulling a revolver from his pocket he aimed it at Dick.

"I'll put yer down!" he screamed, wildly. "I'll kill yer!"

The boy sprang forward just as he fired, and the ball missed him, and speeding on, struck one of the sailors, wounding him.

A cry of rage escaped the crew as the sailor fell groaning to the deck, and the captain was about to fire again when Dick reached him and with one blow knocked him senseless.

"You saw what happened, didn't you?" cried Dick to the crew.

"Ay, ay!" resounded on all sides. "Served him right."

"You acted justly. We will protect you, Dick," said the mate.

"He is a brute!" remarked Dick. "I'm sorry I shipped under him."

Every one of the men heartily indorsed this sentiment, and they might have said more had not the lookout yelled that the storm which had been impending was then coming upon them.

Locking the captain in his cabin, every one hastened to his post, and when the tempest swept down they were ready for it.

The gale was a severe one, lasted all night and through the next day, driving the *Jumping-Jenny* along under bare poles.

When night fell on the sea again there came a terrible crash.

The ship had struck a rock, a hole was stove in her hull close to the garboards, and she began to sink.

By this time the storm was abating.

Two of the boats were launched when it was seen that the ship was going to pieces and bound to sink, and the crew embarked and rode away in the gloom.

Dick and Dr. Pike had been left on the wreck, for there was no room for them with the crew. Another boat remained for them.

They hastily equipped it with water, provisions, oars, an anchor, sails, and some arms, and were on the point of launching her from the davits, when they heard the captain in his cabin, yelling for help, and trying to burst down the door.

"I will release him and give him a chance for his life," said Dick, and he hastened over to the cabin door.

But the key was gone.

To leave Captain Ripley there meant certain death for him.

"Save me!" he yelled, frantically, from within the cabin.

"Swear you will behave, and I'll burst the door down," replied Dick.

"As Heaven hears me I'll do right."

Dick procured an axe, and raining a shower of heavy blows upon the door, he splintered the wood and burst it in.

Between the three they got the boat launched, embarked, and casting off the davits, pulled away on the dark, tossing sea.

Thunder was booming and lightning flashing overhead, and as a roaring billow lifted the boat over its crest and a blinding flash lit up the sea, they saw that they were near to land.

It was an awful struggle to reach it, but they finally managed to get the boat into a sheltered lagoon, where they were out of the fury of the storm, and made a landing.

Before the night was over they saw the ship go to pieces on the outlying reef upon which she had run.

With the dawn of day the storm cleared away entirely, and they partook of a frugal breakfast, rigged up a jury mast, set a sail, and proceeded out on the sea to explore the coast and try to find the rest of the crew.

The captain looked ugly and morose, but he didn't offer to renew his fight, but sat in the stern sheets steering without saying a word to the boy and the doctor.

In this manner they proceeded along the coast, and they saw that the land was a small island, covered with tropical vegetation and lined with surf.

The doctor examined it eagerly, and as they came in sight of a cone-shaped hill rising up in the center, upon the top of which grew a solitary and enormously high palm tree, he sprang to his feet excitedly, and pointing to the tree, he cried:

"By heavens, Dick, this is the very island upon which your father and I were wrecked ten years ago!

"There's the landmark by which I distinguish it," the doctor continued. "That lone palm on the hill."

"And according to the story recited to me by my mother," said the boy, triumphantly, "the barrel of gold nuggets lies buried close to that tree, at a spot which I can easily distinguish."

The captain's eyes gleamed greedily as he listened to these remarks, and he picked up a rifle nervously, when the doctor nudged the boy, cautioning him to be careful of how he spoke.

The boat now turned a jutting strip of land, when a series of wild yells on the shore attracted the castaways' attention, and they were startled to see that the island was inhabited by a tribe of jet black savages, wearing loin clothes and feathered head dresses, while they were armed with spears.

With one arm around the mast, Dick watched the savages

rush from their thatched huts, and uttering loud shouts, they ran down into the water and began to hurl their spears at the three occupants of the boat.

The captain hastily steered the craft away from land, and soon sailed her out of reach of the missiles.

"I don't see how we are going to get the treasure from the isle while those aborigines are there to prevent us landing," said the doctor in disgusted tones. "When I was here last the island was not inhabited. These blacks must have come from one of the neighboring isles since then and settled here."

"There must be over a hundred of them!" remarked Dick. "Yet I am willing to venture up on the hill, under cover of the darkness, and make an attempt to capture the treasure."

"An' I'll go along ter help yer!" said the captain, for the first time breaking his moody silence.

They sent the boat straight out to sea, to deceive the savages of their intention, until they were out of sight, then making a half circuit of the island, they beat about until night-fall.

The boat was then steered in to the island, and they brought her to a pause in a tiny sheltered cove, and went ashore.

Here an idea occurred to the captain to steal the boat, leave them to their fate, and return when the savages killed them, to get the treasure for himself; and he thereupon refused to go with them.

Unsuspicious of his scheme, the boy and the doctor stole away armed, and carrying several implements to dig with.

They reached the top of the hill, and the boy located the south side of the tree, by a compass, and measured off five paces.

Four feet below the surface they encountered a water barrel in a good sound state, and finally succeeded in rolling the heavy thing out upon the side of the hill.

It contained the treasure!

The delight of the two was intense upon finding it intact, but before they could start to roll it down to the shore, the moon burst from behind a cloud bank and revealed to their startled gaze a band of half a hundred natives creeping up the hill on all sides to attack them.

A yell pealed from the blacks, and they rushed forward.

Surrounded on all sides, the two castaways seized their weapons and fired shot after shot at the blacks.

Wounded in many places, the boy and his friend resolved to sell their lives dearly.

Before their enemies could reach the castaways, however, a volley of rifle shots in back of them pealed out, and several savages fell.

"Our crew!" cried Dick, pointing down the hill.

The doctor saw the sailors who had escaped from the *Jumping-Jenny*, armed with pistols and rifles, charging up the hill.

It was evident that they had made a safe landing on this isle, and, having seen the jeopardy of Dick and Pike, came to the rescue.

Demoralized, the savages abandoned the attack and fled.

Pursued by the sailors, every one on the island took to their canoes, and made off for a neighboring isle.

Dick and the doctor rolled the barrel down the hill to the boat, and to their horror found the captain lying on his back upon the shore, pinned to the ground by a native's spear.

He was dead.

The barrel of treasure was put in the boat.

On the following morning the boy and his friend met the crew, told them all that had befallen them, and learned in return that the isle was then in their possession.

Every one voted that they were glad that Ripley was dead, and agreed that as Dick's father had owned the gold it now rightfully belonged to the boy.

They made themselves as comfortable as possible in the savages' huts, and a month afterward were picked up by a ship home bound.

Carried back to New York Dick sold the treasure and realized a large fortune, while the doctor returned to Australia, and the crew of the *Jumping-Jenny* embarked on another ship.

The boy made good use of his money, you may be sure, for it had nearly cost him his life to get it.

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